SHORT STORIES

No. 805 Week Ending June 4, 1904. Price One Penny.

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(A Dramatic Incident from the Splendid Story, "A Charming Grass Widow." See inside.)

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Short Stories

No. 805.] [One Penny.

Week Ending June 4th, 1904.

ANNETTE.

Telling how she Chose Between her Lovers.

She was swinging on a gate; a most undignified position for a girl who was seventeen years old, and who had just come into possession of an avowed lover.

Her quiet elder sister had met him in the lane a minute before, with the flash of early manhood in his frank blue eyes, and the energy of youth and hope ringing in his quick step.

When she reached the gate, she found the young girl laughing until the tears rolled down her cheeks. She stood and looked at her in amazement.

"Annette, what is the matter?" she demanded.

"What do you think? I'm engaged!"

On hearing the reply, her sister laughed, too, until she could not stand, but sat down on a great stone in the lane, just by the fence.

Annette sprang off the gate then, and came beside her. She wore a pink cambric dress, with a white ruffle at her throat; her lithe, girlish figure; her fair, fresh face, her soft, brown hair, braided down her back, and tears of mirth in her dark eyes, she made a picture.

Janet felt as if she had never really seen her before; she grew sober at once. Seventeen years old, and had a lover! It was nothing to laugh at; it was sad, earnest, real; the child had become a woman.

"There is no use in being serious, for it is altogether too funny!" And the young girl laughed afresh, wiping off the tears on the back of her hand; her handkerchief was in the pocket of her dainty apron, but she seemed to scorn its use for such jolly tears.

"But, my dear—" began Janet solemnly.

"But, my dear!" interrupted Annette, with a fresh burst of merriment.

"You don't seem to realise what you are doing!" continued her elder sister, her voice quivering with anxiety.

"Now, Janet, you can't give me a realising sense of things—you know you never could. This world isn't all catechism and creed. Part of it is a joke; jokes are horribly improper, but I like them, and this is *such* a one!"

"It is a pretty serious joke; when you come to marry you will find it out," was the grave reply.

"Marry! Who ever spoke of marrying, Janet?" And the young girl grew suddenly quiet, wiping the tears off the back of her hand on her apron.

"Why, you did."

"I? No, indeed, Janet, you are mistaken. I said I was engaged," was the earnest protest.

"Engaged—what for?" demanded her sister.

"Fun!" laughed the girl.

Janet looked very serious.

"Does Mark Colton think it is for fun?" she asked.

That set Annette off again; when she could grow sober she said:

"Oh, no, indeed, he was so dreadfully in earnest—that is the funniest part of it. He wanted me to promise to be his for all time and eternity. Did you ever hear of anything so silly? I told him that eternity was a thing which we knew nothing about; that time, as compared with it, was only a point, and that I despised points."

Janet would not even smile.

"So I just agreed to be engaged to him, and he sighed, and made the best of it."

"What will aunt say?"

"When she knows, it will be time enough to speculate on that," was the careless retort. Her elder sister looked disapproving.

"Now, Janet, I know that you are going to marry the minister," said the young girl.

"Why?" and the question was accompanied by a slight blush.

"Because you grow more serious every day, and people in love are always serious."

"Then *you* certainly are not in love," retorted Janet; and rising, opened the gate and led the way up the garden-path to the house—a low-browed, weather-stained farmhouse, with projecting eaves, and brown moss and lichens covering the roof.

They both entered, and Annette ran upstairs to her quaint little room under the rafters.

There was something fine and tender in the girl's nature—she went round the shadow, instead of stepping on it; then she sat down in the window, where the sunlight was the broadest. Most people look best in the shade, but the sunlight always brightened Annette into beauty. She had some tatting in her pocket, and now drew it out, her small brown

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hands weaving the delicate fabric with rapid motion. As she sat thus, something wistful came into her dark, piquant face.

She had known Mark Colton from her very babyhood; his father's and her aunt's farms were separated only by the lane of which we have spoken. He was four years her senior. When children, he had taken her on his shoulder many a time and carried her over the brooks that plentifully watered that pleasant section of country; they had ridden the same horse, she seated behind him; had swung on the same gate; and had done a thousand other things together, through all the slow years of childhood.

Of late they had hunted four-leaved clovers and cut their names in the bark of trees, and hovered about love, not knowing it was there—yet held by those many little acts, so full of poetry and romance. Mark was the first to learn.

When he first came face to face with this fact, he was alone, pruning trees in his father's orchard; the blood surged to the roots of his flaxen hair; he dropped his pruning-knife and started impetuously towards the farmhouse on the other side of the lane. He only went a few steps, though, then turned back, and picking up his knife, went on with his work.

That same day he met Annette, and was so quiet and reserved, that she demanded, in a pet, what he was so cross about; and that night, at a party in the village, she would not look at him, but devoted herself to the other boys, especially the new minister's brother Philip, a pale-faced, interesting youth, who was studying theology.

That was four months ago. The trees in the orchard had blossomed and budded, and now were heavy with fruit; and all that time Mark Colton had kept the secret that he found in his pruning that day.

Since then Annette had not been able to understand him; he had been unreasonable, exacting, cross, she said; and she, because she knew it troubled him, though she hardly comprehended why, was especially kind and merry with Philip, whilst the young student dreamt of her both waking and sleeping.

During three months she never looked at Mark when others were present, and when alone with him, laughed at and slighted everything he said. He bore it all in his patient, manly way, but this day of which we have been telling, took the matter in his own hands, told her his love in an impetuous way, and brought her to the unsatisfactory terms which we have recorded.

The girl was thinking of all this, sitting thus in the sunlight. Suddenly her tatting fell into her lap, and she held her two hands up, and looked at them. Mark had kissed them.

"What a silly boy!"—that was the thought, with a little quivering smile upon her lips that would never have grown into a laugh. Then her aunt Helen's shrill voice rang out from the foot of the stairs:

"Annette! Annette!"

She put her tatting in her pocket, and went to answer the summons. The minister and Philip were coming to tea, and she was wanted.

Janet was moving about in a sort of blissful dream. She wore a white dress, and had a scarlet geranium in her black hair. Twenty-four years seemed terribly old to Annette. She had never supposed Janet would be in love; she thought she was too old. Her quiet elder sister had always been beautiful to her, but she had never seen her so lovely as now.

They came just at tea-time. Annette opened the door for them; she was always bashful with the minister, but everything merry in her nature seemed to develop for Philip. She ushered the minster formally into the drawing-room, and, motioning to Philip, detained him in the hall, and put a bunch of flowers in his buttonhole.

The tea-bell rang almost instantly. Annette's plate was laid beside the minister's, Janet's by Philip's. The minister smiled a trifle at the arrangement. Annette saw the smile, and did not feel so much afraid of him. He looked like Philip, only he had force and vitality.

Aunt Helen did most of the talking. The minister gave polite attention to what she said; but Philip sat and gazed at Annette in a sort of dream, and never heard a word until she came to these:

"They ought to have been plain Jane and Ann, but their mother was a Spanish woman, and insisted on the *ette*; and their father was always so bewitched with her that he had but little sense."

"Does Janet look as her mother did?" asked the minister, smiling into the dark eyes on the opposite side of the table. Annette saw that smile, too, and gave Philip a funny look that capitivated him. Since he was not thinking of either his brother or Janet, he took it all to himself.

"The girls both favour her, only she was deemed handsome," was Aunt Helen's dry retort.

A little later Annette and Philip stood watching Janet and the minister stroll down the lane.

"See, they are in love," whispered the girl, with a smile.

"*They* are going to be married," said Philip, and sighed.

Mark Colton joined them just in time to hear this. For the first time in her life his approach brought a quick blush to Annette's dark cheeks.

Philip saw it, with a bright look on his dreamy face; he thought he had called it forth. Mark thought the same, and his brow clouded. Annette saw the mutual mistake, and a sudden coquetry seized her.

"Mark, *they* are going to be married," she said, accenting the words exactly as Philip had done, and pointing to the retreating figures in the lane.

Philip looked both hurt and embarrassed. The cloud on Mark's brow was instantly dissipated; he caught the upraised hand in his.

"Annette, it is as impolite to point as to whisper," he said.

Philip turned pale. She drew her hand impatiently away. Mark abruptly left them, and went out on the balcony, grieved and troubled. She and Philip stayed in the window, laughing and talking, until the twilight deepened, and the moon and stars came out. Then they also came upon the balcony. Mark paid no attention to their coming. Philip sat down beside him. Annette stood in the doorway.

"See, Philip, how pretty that white rose looks in the moonlight! Can you get it for me?" she said.

He went down the steps for it gladly. The moment he had gone, she whispered in Mark's ear, so close that her long braid of hair fell on his shoulder, "What a silly boy you are!" and took the seat that Philip had vacated. Just then he came back, followed by Janet and the minister, and a few minutes later Mark and Annette went to the gate to watch the brothers out of sight as they took their way to the village.

As they stood thus, Mark took her hand in his, and she did not draw it away. His face was troubled.

"When I took your hand when Philip was here, you were offended; and yet we are engaged. Why?" he asked.

"What is the use of telling all the world?" she replied gaily.

"You mean what's the use of telling Philip?" he retorted. She was silent. He continued:

"When we are married, even Philip will have to know."

"I do not know any one who is going to be married excepting Janet and the minister," she said coolly.

He bade her "Good-night" instantly at that, and she went into the house and up into her own room. She sat down on the edge of her little bed and cried, "I wish I had never seen either of them," in the midst of her tears.

* * * * *

The summer wore away, and the autumn came. Janet and the minister were married, and went to live at the parsonage in the village.

During this time, Mark, Philip, and Annette had lived in a most unhappy, discontented way. Of the three, Annette was the most wretched, for she suffered the continual reproach of an outraged conscience.

All these summer months the young student had lived in an unreal world, dreaming a dream that would never be realised. She knew this, yet did not undeceive him. At first an innate coquetry prompted her to silence, and after that she had not the courage to give him pain. She loved Mark, but Philip

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called forth all the pity in her nature; and pity with some women is almost as strong as love.

The course which she had pursued had wrought a great change in Mark. A slow discontent and jealousy took possession of him; he became sullen and unreasonable. At length one day his unhappiness took form, and shaped itself into a resolve. He was becoming dwarfed and embittered; the manly purpose had gone out of him; he saw it all, realised it all. The girl did not love him as he loved her—probably never would. If he continued as he was now, she would very justly grow to despise him.

His father had long wished him to attend a course of study in a neighbouring town; he would release her, set her free, and go at once.

He acted instantly upon his resolution.

As he went down the lane he saw her standing at the gate, quite where he had told her of his love those months gone by. The lane was bordered by trees, whose foliage was all crimson and gold; she had a scarlet cloak thrown over her shoulders, and looked a part of the autumn. It seemed as if he could not do it, but he did, with the old manly look coming back into his face. Even her lips grew pale.

"You are right, Mark! It is best that we should both be free."

Then she was alone.

He strode down the lane to hide his anguish from what he thought her careless eye, and she sat down on the stone outside the gate where Janet had sat the day she told her she was engaged, and burying her face in her hands, moaned.

When it was known that Mark had gone, the conclusion drawn was this: "Then it is at last decided that Annette is to marry Philip." Philip thought so, too, yet his natural timidity restrained him from learning the truth from the girl's own lips.

As he went down the lane he saw her standing at the gate.

Annette was wretched, she learnt that she loved Mark better than her life; that the days without him were endless and sad. She had never been separated from him before. Sometimes she cried bitterly.

Her disposition had been evenly sweet and joyous; now she became moody.

Aunt Helen noticed the change, and with her keen instinct guessed the secret. She said nothing to Annette, however, for under her stiff ways beat a kind heart.

The minister's wife felt rather than saw the change in the girl. There was something, for all her gay and careless manner, that disquieted her sister

Did she care that Mark had gone away? It hardly seemed possible, she had such a frank, unconcerned way of speaking of him. Did she love Philip? She was very kind to him—too kind; she was gentle, almost pitying, to him.

Philip's was a nature that would always be craving sympathy, a clinging, dependent nature; Annette was strong and self-sustained; one could supply the want of the other; but would Annette always be content to supply? The minister's wife was excessively troubled, and it was the only trouble which she could not take to her husband.

She could not talk to anyone of it; she did not suppose that Aunt Helen had noticed any change in her, and she had not the courage to speak to the young girl herself.

So the winter passed, and the spring, and the summer, and yet Mark did not come. His father advised him to see a bit of the world during his vacation, and he did so.

Then it was another autumn, and a whole year had passed since they had parted. There was bitterness in Annette's heart; he had doubtless forgotten her; why should she not forget him?

It was when this bitterness possessed her that Philip told her of his love, and besought her promise to be his wife.

She was standing at the gate where she had last seen Mark.

Our fates swing on very small pivots. Had she been anywhere else than at the gate, in her present mood, she would have accepted him; as it was, she did the first wise thing that she had done since she first knew him; she asked time to think.

He begged her to promise there and then, with a sudden pallor coming into his face, but she persistently refused, and he turned from her sadly and went away.

She watched him go down the lane as she had Mark a year ago,—watched him coldly, critically; then that dangerous element of pity in her nature asserted itself, and she came outside the gate impetuously, as if to call him back; but her wiser, truer nature restrained her.

"It is my punishment to make him suffer as I do. I would die before I would marry him," she said, and sat down upon the great stone by the fence.

As she sat there, Janet came up the lane, and stood beside her. The unhappiness on the girl's face was so apparent that she yielded to her first impulse, and asked anxiously:

"Annette, my dear child, tell me what is the matter?"

The girl's effort for gaiety was painful.

"Why, Janet, at last I have got a realising sense of things."

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"Tell me about it," said the minister's wife, with her voice full of tenderness.

"There is nothing to tell," was the reply, and Annette rose and led the way to the house.

Aunt Helen stood in the doorway; she had a basket of pippins in her hand, which she had just been gathering.

Annette took one and tried to eat it; she could not—it choked her. She threw it away, went into the house, and up to her own room.

Aunt Helen and the minister's wife looked at each other, and in that moment, for the first time in their lives, each understood the other. Aunt Helen loved Annette "as the apple of her eye," and Janet had only just found it out.

"She cannot do anything. God forbid that she should marry for pity!" she said, and her keen, critical eyes had tears in them.

The next afternoon Philip came into the parsonage with a pale face. Janet had seen him go away, and watched anxiously for his return. She felt instinctively that he had gone to Annette to learn his fate and hers. There was a sudden prayer of thankfulness in her heart when she saw him. They were both saved.

He came into the sitting-room where she was, and threw himself on the sofa. He was restless, and occasionally moaned. He never even saw Janet. She left the room with tears in her eyes.

After an hour had passed she returned. His face was flushed, his eyes bloodshot. She went beside him, and placed her hand on his forehead. He had a hot fever.

"You are not well, Philip," she said gently.

"I? No, I believe not. I think I will go to bed," he said, and went up to his own room.

Annette had seen this ahead of her for a whole year, and now stood there condemned. Her own heart condemned her—hence God, who is greater than our hearts, condemned her, too.

That was her moral attitude, this her actual physical one. She stood in the upper hall, right outside the door, and heard Philip, in sad delirium, tell her trouble, and his, to all who came to his bedside—to Janet and the minister, to the kind old doctor and Aunt Helen. He told it over and over again, sometimes in the very words she had told it to him, for she had accepted it as part of her punishment to let him know of her love for Mark.

At first she suffered bitter shame and mortification in having them all know how she had been slighted; and this soon gave place to anxiety, for the doctor said that Philip's life was very uncertain.

He had not been well all summer—had had a sort of fever in his veins. They assured her repeatedly that this would have been the result at any rate; but she censured herself wholly, and grew thin and pale with dread.

"If he dies," she said, "I have killed him."

Several times she tried to stay in the room, but, although he did not know her, her presence increased his delirium, so she remained in the hall, watching the face of each one who came out, with eyes grown hollow and despairing. In the end they were as anxious for her as for Philip. Even the minister forgave her the sorrow she had caused his brother, in pity for her retribution.

So many days and nights went by, and at last the doctor said to Aunt Helen:

"There are worse things in this world than death. No brain will bear a continual strain of remorse and fear."

Aunt Helen's strong, angular figure quivered. He left her, and went into the hall.

"Annette," he said kindly, but firmly, "you must take this."

She took the powder as submissively as a child. They had placed a sofa in the hall for her. A little later, when Aunt Helen came out, she found her lying on it in a heavy, dreamless sleep. Whilst she was in that sleep Philip passed the crisis and lived.

Several months passed. In that time the young student struggled reluctantly back into health, and went away for a final year in college, and Annette, subdued and saddened by her late bitter experience, stayed very closely at home with Aunt Helen.

Her friends, only knowing half of the story, censured her greatly, setting her down as a cruel flirt and jilt. At first she persistently shunned society, refusing every invitation; but at length her natural pride asserted itself, and she made great efforts to be her old self and take her old place.

So another year went by, and the village was all astir. Mark Colton was expected home, and so was Philip, and there was a round of gaiety planned for their reception. Mrs. Colton opened the season by issuing a great number of invitations. Mark was expected to arrive on a certain morning, and his friends were to meet him in the evening.

Philip was already at the parsonage, and someone had seen him several times walking with Annette in the pleasant lane that separated Aunt Helen's farm from Mr. Colton's. This was told over and over in the village. Of course nobody knew who the *someone* was who had seen this, but each one considered his or her informant perfectly reliable, and that was sufficient. There had been a great deal of wonderment as to whether Annette would dare run the risk of meeting Philp by accepting the invitation, but, of course, this settled the question.

Some of the girls secretly sighed over it; they had hoped Annette would not join in the gaiety. Mark had left on account of Philip, and now both Mark and Philip were back, and in the time that had elapsed Annette, who was always pretty, had bloomed into positive beauty.

Whilst her little world was discussing her probable course of action, Annette was struggling between her heart and her pride. The former begged her to stay at home, the latter sneered at her weakness and taunted her with being afraid to meet one who had not thought of her for two long years.

Aunt Helen never asked her what she intended to do, but Annette saw them both look at her anxiously, and she secretly shed many bitter, mortified tears. So far as walking in the lane was concerned, why, so unreliable was that indefinite someone that the whole thing was a fabrication; she did not even see him until the day of the party. Then he came to the house and waited on the balcony until she came out. Somewhat later, she went into the sitting-room, where Aunt Helen sat knitting. "I have decided to go to-night with Philip," she said.

The spinster pushed up her spectacles and looked at the girl with surprise.

"He is going to be married, and is as happy as can be. I needn't trouble over that any more," she continued, joyfully.

"I never saw a man yet who hadn't a surprising capacity for loving," commented Aunt Helen.

Annette laughed, then grew suddenly grave. "I think, after all, it is well they are so constituted, Aunt Helen," she said, and went up to her room to decide on her toilet.

Everybody was at that first party—old and young, married and single. Even Aunt Helen went, causing a general expression of astonishment by her presence; for she had not been to a party for forty years. She started early, telling Annette that she meant to see the whole thing through, from beginning to end.

Mark stood beside his mother, and more than once found his blue eyes brought directly to meet the keen, critical eyes of the spinster. She did everything from principle, was honest to the backbone; hence she treated him with the coldness and displeasure which she felt. He had always been a favourite with her—hence he was perplexed and troubled by her manner.

When we love we feel a sort of attraction towards anyone who is in the habit of being near the object of our affection. Mark had such a feeling for Aunt Helen, and her rebuff seemed like a shadow of Annette's; for in these years—wonderful fact to record in the history of man!—he had been wholly constant to his first love.

He had heard from his mother of her refusal of Philip, and had begun to think that, perhaps, he had been over-hasty, and to entertain a faint hope of winning her after all.

In courts of law men have often been wrongly condemned on circumstantial evidence. Annette this evening was placed

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in a like position. When she came into the room on Philip's arm everyone considered the matter settled.

Mark grew deathly pale—even his lips were white, and he clutched the back of the chair by which he stood, as if for support.

Philip led her directly to him. She had never looked more lovely; she held out her hand in frank, cordial welcome, the bright crimson mantling her cheek. She had been preparing herself for this all day. He was taken unawares—hence at a disadvantage; and Aunt Helen's shrewd eyes took it all in with a smile breaking up the lines of her face.

Mark shook hands with them both; he tried to be cordial, but failed signally, and the moment they joined the gay crowd that were promenading, he abruptly left his mother to receive the guests, and left the room.

Aunt Helen did everything on principle; she acted according to the rule of her life now, and followed the young man. She found him on the balcony.

"You are not well?" she said.

There was always a pleasant courtesy about Mark. He thanked her for her kindness, saying he would be all right in a minute.

"What made you so unhappy?" she asked.

There is a great deal of power in a direct question. Mark found himself face to face with this one, and did not know how to escape it.

"Aunt Helen," he said, and his voice quivered painfully, "so Annette is going to marry Philip after all?"

"You are very much mistaken! Philip is going to be married, yet not to Annette. But what is it to you whether Annette marries or not?"

In his sudden joy he was wholly off his guard.

"It is so much to me, Aunt Helen, that if my surmise had been correct, I should wish that I were dead!"

"Dear me! It is curious how two ordinarily sensible people can misunderstand each other," commented the spinster drily; and a moment after went back to the drawing-room, with her arm resting stiffly on Mark's.

Mark Colton made a delightful host that evening. Everybody was charmed and enjoyed themselves to the full, excepting Annette, yet she seemed the gayest of the gay; she even danced repeatedly with Mark, and laughed and talked as lightly as if he were a new acquaintance that she was delighted to make. Once or twice after a dance he tried to lead her out on the balcony, but she shivered, saying it was too cold, though there was scarce a chill in the late May evening.

At length he came beside her, and, throwing a shawl of his mother's over her shoulders, said, and there was something teasing in his earnest voice:

"You have no excuse now."

She took his arm instantly, the colour deepening in her cheeks. Just at that moment the music started for a quadrille, so they found the balcony deserted.

When once there, she drew her hand from his arm. For a moment there was an uncomfortable silence; then he said in an embarrassed tone:

"So you are not going to marry Philip after all?"

"I? Oh, no; of course not!" she answered, as if such a thing had never been thought of before.

"Whom are you going to marry, then?" he asked.

She laughed.

"Oh, no one; I'm going to be an old maid, like Aunt Helen."

Philip led her straight to him.

She had been restlessly clasping and unclasping her bracelet. Now it fell to the floor—he picked it up—she held out her hand to take it, but he clasped it round her white wrist himself, and then unclasped it and clasped it again. The crimson flooded her cheeks for an instant, their eyes met, a smile came into his; she looked quickly away.

"Annette, you have tormented me for two years," he said.

"Discipline is healthy," she retorted, with a laugh, though there were tears of joy on her long lashes.

"Am I the only one who has been disciplined?" he asked, with grave eagerness.

"I despise questions," she replied, and dashed the tears away.

"Yet you must answer one now, Annette," he said. "Will you love Mark Colton and be his wife?"

"That is two questions," was the provoking reply.

"One answer will do for both," he said, and bowed his head until he received it.

Annette was among the first to go home. She came with Philip and went with him. The gossips were entirely off the track. Aunt Helen was among the last guests, and Mark made everyone laugh, the spinster heartiest of them all, by coolly kissing her "Good night."

In less than a week everybody knew it, and that autumn, in the little village church, the ceremony was performed by the minister, assisted by Philip, who had just been ordained.

S. Chesnewood.

THE BOYS' LEADER.

"The Paper a Boy Can Take Home."

ONE PENNY WEEKLY.

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Containing the Incident depicted on the Cover.

A Charming Grass Widow.

Telling How She Became So, and What Happened Afterwards.

When Horace Lingard married Doris Dallas all he brought that pretty, vivacious, though quick-tempered, girl was a sheaf of unpaid bills.

Doris was very much in love with the scapegrace—thoughtless, good-humoured young fellow—and that explains everything. For Doris, you see, had a cool £4,000 a year in her own right, while Horace's sole income was a meagre allowance from his father, a retired major.

Young Mrs. Lingard paid her husband's debts without a murmur. She even set aside a sum that ought to have been more than sufficient for her spouse's requirements. But Horace was not satisfied. In spite of his "don't-care-a-hang-about-anything" kind of style, in spite of his appropriating the sum set aside for him by his young wife, every farthing of which he most religiously spent, it galled him to think that he depended so entirely upon his pretty bride. Yet he never attempted reformation. Life was too short to quarrel with one's lot, he argued, especially when it happens to be a rosy one.

Mrs. Dallas, Doris' mother, was not like most mothers-in-law. Immediately after the wedding breakfast she had called Horace aside.

"Horace," said she, "you've an excellent wife, so be good to her. Don't turn away, I'm not going to lecture you. All I want to tell you is that I shall come and stay with you for one day every six months. Newly-married couples don't want mothers-in-law hanging round them, so remember I give you six months' grace. Good-bye."

When the couple returned from their honeymoon, Mrs. Lingard made a suggestion to her husband.

"I've been thinking, dear," she began, "that it must sometimes be unpleasant for you to know that—that—well, that you spend my money instead of your own. No, no! Don't look cross, I have a suggestion. You told me once you had written a few short stories. Suppose you were to rent a room in some nice chambers in Chancery Lane. You could have a big brass place on the door inscribed in large letters: 'Horace Lingard, Author.' Now, haven't you a really clever little wife?"

Horace did recollect one boastful moment when he told the pretty heiress he had written short stories, but he had neglected to state that no editor could be found who would print them.

"But, my dear girl," he replied truthfully, "I can't write stories or articles or anything else for toffee. I should never earn sixpence at it."

"Oh, you silly boy," said Doris, laughing heartily. "No one wants you to. When people say to me, 'What is your husband's profession?' I shall promptly reply, 'Oh, he's an awfully busy man. He's an author, you know.' Some authors, Horace, earn thousands of pounds a year."

"And some earn nothing," added her husband. "But still, the idea's not half bad. Perhaps I shall be able to turn out something decent—if I can settle down."

And at that moment he really meant it, too.

So it was settled. A room was taken, a brass plate was fixed on the door, a brand new typewriter was purchased, which was never used, and the author turned out each morning with the strongest intention to begin work, which usually ended in the consumption of many cigars, chats with innumerable pals, and nothing else.

Doris' mother kept her promise to the letter. She, of course, corresponded regularly with her daughter, but during the whole six months she did not once set foot in the couple's house.

The day for her visit eventually arrived.

"Now, look here, Horace," said Doris one morning, "Mamma has written that she is coming to-day to see us, and I want you to come home by two o'clock. Never mind about that novel you are writing, which has kept you so late at the office recently. Be here to show mamma how dutiful and loving a husband you are."

"All right, dearest," rejoined Horace. "I'll finish up a chapter and come straight home."

"What is the number of the chapter you are writing?" asked the young wife with just a faint tinge of suspicion.

"Oh, well—I couldn't really tell you, my dear, offhand. But I'll be home punctually to the minute, you can rest assured at that."

The "author" departed. His great novel, which was going to take the reading public by storm, except for its title, did not exist.

* * * * * * *

"Yes, mamma," said Doris, "Horace will be certain to be here by two o'clock. He promised me faithfully."

But two o'clock brought him not.

"He's soon got like the rest of them," muttered Mrs. Dallas, hurt at her son-in-law's undutifulness.

"Don't be harsh on him, mamma. Horace may have been detained by important business, or he may even have met with an accident." The young wife brushed her eyes with a dainty silk handkerchief.

But as the hours passed both ladies began to get angry, especially Mrs. Dallas. They were both in a bad temper when at seven o'clock they sat down to dinner alone.

"I'm sure something must have happened to him," exclaimed the young wife for about the fiftieth time.

Mrs. Dallas laughed derisively.

"Don't talk to me of happenings, child," said the older woman sarcastically. "I used to think the same of your father. Business detained him sometimes, but more often something else. I know the sort of happening which keeps young married men away from home when their wives' mothers visit them. His absence is a deliberate insult to me, and considering that I have denied myself the pleasure of seeing my own daughter for six months, it is shameful."

"But, mamma——"

"Don't make any more excuses for him. Your husband is like most other men. He will come home after midnight—intoxicated."

"If he does I will never forgive him."

"Oh, yes, you will, and be as full of excuses for him to-morrow as you are to-day."

"Never. He will not return intoxicated. He has never done so. Why are you so bitter against him?" The young wife burst into a fit of sobbing.

"There, there, my dear, don't cry like that," said her mother, drawing Doris' slim figure to her. "Perhaps I'm wrong in thinking Horace married you merely for your money. Anyway, I'm going to stop the night with you, and if he does come home intoxicated, I'll tell you how to talk to him."

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Now it so happened that the very day Mrs. Dallas had chosen for her visit was Derby day. Heroically putting aside all inclination to see the race for the "blue riband of the Turf," Horace Lingard pursued his way to his Chancery Lane chambers. In the Strand he ran up against Robson, of St. Peter's, an old college chum.

"You're the very chap we want to complete the quartet," said he, after the usual formula of greeting had been gone through. "I'm on my way to meet Baxter and Stevenson—both St. Peter's boys; you know them. We're going to the Derby. You really must come."

"Can't, my boy," said Horace. "Fact is, I'm writing a book. Don't laugh! Yes, a real novel, and I can't spare the time."

The figure of the elegant Robson doubled up with laughter.

"Upon my word, Lingard," he gurgled, "you're a born humourist. You stand there looking as sober as a stuffed toad and tell me you're a hard-working novelist—you, the laziest scoundrel in London. Oh, the impertinence of married youth." Tears were pouring from Robson's eyes.

"Well, it's like this, old chap," returned the abashed Horace, who felt such twitting keenly, "I haven't really begun the book yet. I've been making up my mind to start this past three months. But, I say, I'll come with you and see the boys. What have you been doing lately?"

Thus adroitly changing the conversation, Horace accompanied his friend to a certain Strand restaurant. An hour later the quartet, Horace's feeble refusal being entirely disregarded, commenced their journey to Epsom. At the Derby the gaiety about him, the people he knew, and the champagne he drank with one and the other, drove from his thoughts all remembrance of Doris, her mother, and his promise to be home at two o'clock that day.

Immediately after the great race nothing would please his three companions than that Horace should dine with them at their West End club.

"But, my dear boys," protested Horace's thickened voice. "I can't dine with you in these." He was dressed in a suit of light tweed.

"Oh, that's all right," explained Stevenson. "My diggings are just by the club. We're all going to change there. You can have my spare suit. You're about my figure."

Two o'clock the next morning, Horace, still wearing the borrowed dress suit, but a weary, limp, unsteady Horace, was carried home in a hansom cab.

He ascended the steps leading to his house with exceeding difficulty. Greater trouble was experienced in finding the keyhole, which, when found, refused to open the door at the insertion of a pocket knife. After ten minutes' weary effort Horace was beginning to expostulate when the door was suddenly opened from the inside. Horace staggered into the hall, to be welcomed with stern glances from Mrs. Lingard and her mother.

"Will you be good enough to come into the drawing-room, Mr. Lingard," said his wife, with frigid sarcasm.

"What's the matter?" he asked innocently, and endeavouring to speak naturally. Mrs. Dallas followed him into the room.

"Oh, merely nothing. Allow me to introduce my mother."

"Dear me! Pleased to see you. Won't you sit down. Make yourself at—— Just remembered, my dear. Ought to have come early, of course, but——"

"You ought, sir," interrupted the young wife, coldly. "Perhaps you will tell me how you managed to get into the house to dress, and why you left it without seeing me?"

Horace looked helplessly at his borrowed clothes.

"Upon my honour, my dear," he stammered, "I haven't been home at all!"

"You went out in morning dress?"

"So I did, Doris; so I did. Where did I get these clothes? Bothered if I know. They fit all——"

"Just listen to me, sir, if you are sufficiently sober. Some hours ago I said that if you came home intoxicated I would never forgive you. You have insulted me, you have insulted my mother, and I shall never forgive you." The young wife was almost hysterical.

Both ladies left the room.

Horace awoke next morning with a fearful headache. He had passed the night in an easy chair in the drawing-room.

In the breakfast-room plates were laid for one.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked the maid.

"She breakfasts in her own room, sir."

Horace went upstairs and knocked at his wife's door.

"Well? What is it?" his wife inquired.

"Doris, dear. Are you ill?"

Horace felt very ashamed of his conduct. At an encouraging word from his wife he would have made a clean breast of the previous day's doings.

"Go away. I don't want to see you," replied Doris.

"Let me in, my dear. I'll explain."

Mrs. Lingard had not slept a moment. "Where had her husband obtained that dress suit?" she asked herself a thousand times. Her mother had encouraged her in her suspicions.

"I shall not let you in," she cried. "You have deceived me"—her voice rose to an hysterical pitch—"you've insulted mamma. Go away, and don't come back till you've money of your own to fling away in drunken orgies."

The words struck Horace like the lash of a whip.

"Do you mean what you say?" he asked angrily.

"Certainly I do."

He paused a moment, then he said quite calmly—

"Well, good-bye, then." But his wife made no reply.

Horace Lingard left the house. He did not return that day nor the next. Doris became very uneasy. She was already sorry for the words she had uttered. A week passed, and she became seriously alarmed. She and her mother went to Horace's chambers in Chancery Lane. His room was "To Let." He had paid his rent bill some days previously. Inquiry at his banker's elicited the fact that he had drawn out every penny—his account did not exceed fifty pounds. Major Lingard, his father, had not seen or heard of him.

A month passed without tidings of the runaway. Mrs. Lingard became seriously ill. Three months' stay in the Riviera improved her health, but made her still more anxious for the return of the good-humoured though thoughtless husband.

Heartrending advertisements in the principal newspapers, investigation by "Captain Bertram Lynx, the up-to-date detective," carried on over a period of months and running up a bill which exceeded £200—all efforts were of no avail.

When a year had gone by Mrs. Lingard became somewhat reconciled. As for Mrs. Dallas, who blamed herself for being the cause of the trouble in suggesting to her daughter that she should throw into her husband's face his dependence upon her purse, the really good-hearted old lady tried to atone for the mischief by whirling Doris from one form of excitement and gaiety to another. The grass-widow seemed not to mind. She visited theatres, attended concerts, opened bazaars—every day she was busy at some public or Society function.

Entertainments on behalf of charitable undertakings especially appealed to the pretty Mrs. Lingard, and the stall over which she presided was always certain to bring in large receipts. Perhaps it was due to the mystery which shrouded her husband's sudden disappearance, the reason for which, of course, the world did not know.

It was quite eighteen months after Doris' cruel words had driven her husband from his home when the great flower bazaar was begun at the Albert Hall. It was one of those usual smart affairs, when folk allow themselves to be robbed right and left in "charity's sweet name." The great hall was superbly decorated with flowers, and stalls for the sale of certain blooms were presided over by pretty women who were dressed to represent the flowers they sold.

Mrs. Lingard disposed of bluebells, and was herself dressed to represent this pretty flower. Her fair, perfectly-chiselled features looked out from a bonnet shaped like a bluebell; her rich silk gown was similarly shaped. Indeed she was pro-

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nounced to be the most prettily dressed among dozens of fashionable women attired to represent favourite flowers.

The grass-widow sold her button-holes at ten shillings apiece; her bouquets fetched from two to five guineas. She was in the act of pinning one of these button-holes in the coat of an admiring purchaser on the third evening of the bazaar when her eye was caught by the unkempt, unwashed figure of a man.

She wondered for a moment why they had ever allowed such a ragamuffin into the hall. As a matter of fact, the authorities had resisted the man's invasion, but he had put down his half-a-crown, and in a determined tone had declined to leave.

He was a regular scarecrow. His bowler hat was battered and greasy; his coat was torn and threadbare; his trousers were frayed at the bottoms; his boots were worn at the heel. He had not been shaved for a week, and his face and hands were grimy.

He sauntered slowly along, heedless of the shuddering of fashionable dames or the pointed remarks of well-dressed men.

At the pretty grass-widow's stall he stopped.

"How much for this?" he said, taking the bluebells into his grimy fingers.

"Ten shillings," said the living Bluebell. The pink had left her cheeks.

"I'll take it; please fix it in my coat." Doris' senses were reeling, but she noticed that, despite the scarecrow's clothes, he had the voice of a gentleman.

Mrs. Lingard fastened the button-hole in the man's greasy coat. She tried to avoid looking into his face, but the impulse was too strong for her. A moment later a woman's shriek rang through the building. Doris had fainted.

Immediately the flower stall was surrounded by eager questioners. The disreputable-looking man had been seen by the stall. A search was made for him. He had vanished.

Mrs. Dallas was at her daughter's side when she recovered.

"What is it, darling?" she anxiously inquired.

"Home, mamma; home, at once," was her only reply.

In her own home the grass-widow broke into a fit of passionate sobbing. Her mother left her to have her cry out.

"Tell me, dear," asked Mrs. Dallas, "what it was that alarmed you? Was it that scarecrow who——"

"That scarecrow was—was Horace."

The following day the advertisements again appeared in the agony columns of the newspapers. Yet though many callers and letters were received, no news was gained of the missing husband. Mrs. Lingard kept to her room. Her health gave way. She cried repeatedly for her husband and lover. At last Mrs. Dallas insisted that Doris should go to the theatre. Doris was too weak to resist. She dressed mechanically, and walked to the carriage at her door as if in a dream.

It was a few minutes to eight o'clock, and the Strand was thronged with vehicles. Mrs. Lingard's carriage was compelled to proceed at a walking pace; now and again it stopped. On one of these occasions it paused where the lamps of a public-house threw a strong glare on the pavement. The grass-widow was looking out of the window. Suddenly, before her mother had the least idea of what she was going to do, she flung the door open and was out on the pavement.

And then the public were treated gratis to as dramatic a scene as ever was witnessed in the house of melodrama close at hand.

A woman, in light attire, with bare arms and neck, and diamonds in her hair, had flung herself into the arms of a dirty man on the pavement, and was sobbing as though her heart would break.

The dirty man lifted her up tenderly, half carried her to the carriage, shouted "Home" to the coachman, and took his place beside her.

Mrs. Lingard was the first to speak when the carriage was well on its way back.

"Oh, Horace," she cried, "forgive me those harsh words. I never meant them, really. I love you sincerely. And you, poor boy, have been living all these months in London in poverty."

"Don't reproach yourself, my darling," answered Horace Lingard, for he it was; "it is the best thing that could have happened to me. It has made a man of me. And I'm not poor now, Doris. I've been mining in Western Australia. I could write a cheque for thousands."

"But why," asked Mrs. Dallas, "are you dressed so—so—unconventionally. Why did you come to the flower bazaar?"

"I wanted to see if Doris would cut me, that's all. I wasn't certain, so I followed your cariage to-night. I was going to meet you at the door of the theatre. But, you see, it was quite unnecessary."

"Yes, quite unnecessary, dear Horace," repeated his wife, passing a soft, white arm round his grimy neck. "But you must be a good boy and—and wash yourself when we get home, and we'll live happy ever after, as they do in the story books."

J. G. Jones.

NEARLY A TRAGEDY.

Showing How He Laughs Longest Who Laughs Last.

The old clock standing in the corner of the kitchen had just struck ten, and had then burst out into song, so to speak, of the five old, old tunes which its maker, with perverted ingenuity, had affixed to its internal economy.

"Beautiful old tune," said Mr. Willie Lamb, who was in the humour to be delighted with anything, as the rusty old mechanism, after two or three gasps and rattlings, changed from "The Lass of Richmond Hill" to a pathetic rendering of "Old Dog Tray."

"I am glad you like it—it is quite a family relic," said Miss Amy Marjoribanks, who was sitting on a low stool by his side with her hand resting affectionately in his.

"Ah," murmured the gentleman," "we must try to get a family relic or two when you consent to make me the most foolishly happy of men."

"Foolishly happy!" said the lady archly. "Oh, Willie, you ungallant man! And I'm afraid papa will not give you the chance. I wonder why he is so prejudiced against you?"

"I suppose he thinks my position is not good enough," answered Mr. Lamb despondingly. "I know of nothing else."

"I wonder what would happen if he caught you here?" remarked Miss Amy, her delicate frame convulsed with a shudder.

"Kicks!" said the gentleman grimly.

"Oh, Willie, surely—surely you don't mean that you would kick papa," faltered the lady.

"No, my darling—no; Heaven forbid! I have too much respect for him (and his weight too)," muttered the lover; "but I could hardly expect *him* to exercise such forbearance. He is a very violent man."

"He is a little violent," agreed the dutiful daughter; "but I think it is his wretched health more than anything else."

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"His—" blurted the gentleman, and then stopped suddenly. A mental picture of the invalid in question—stout, ruddy, and with the fabled digestion of the ostrich—rose suddenly before his eyes; but he understood women, and he altered his sentence: "Yes, you are right, my love, as you always are; that must be the cause."

This happy agreement led to several tender passages in which Mr. Lamb shone to much advantage, when the happy couple were suddenly disturbed by the distant grating of a key in a lock. As they listened, horrified beyond all measure, their unwilling ears heard the street door open and shut, after which the house shook and rattled as the invalid wiped his boots on the door-mat.

"Fly!" gasped the terrified Amy.

Mr. Lamb's white, dry lips formed the word:

"Where?"

"Anywhere," said the lady lucidly. Then she seized his arm, and said: "Coal cellar!" And, dragging him to the end of the kitchen, flung open a door, and, pushing him in, hastily closed and locked it. Sounds of stumbling were heard—Mr. Lamb was falling over the coals. Miss Marjoribanks pressed her hands to her bewildered head, and sank into a chair.

"Well," roared Mr. Marjoribanks, in a voice that shook the rafters and Mr. Lamb's terrified soul, as he entered the kitchen; "where's the supper?"

"What supper?" murmured his daughter, who had not yet recovered her presence of mind.

"What supper?" said the astonished old gentleman. "Why, my supper. Come, where is it? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Oh, I'll get it in a minute, dear," was the response; "my head aches so that I hardly know what I am doing. Shall I draw you any beer?"

"Shall you draw me any beer?" repeated the irritable old man. "Why, what's the matter with the girl? Have you ever known me to miss my beer yet—eh?"

Supper, except for the unnecessary noise which Mr. Marjoribanks deemed requisite to its proper mastication, proceeded in silence. The unfortunate Amy, snugly ensconced in a cushioned chair, thought of her lover sitting disconsolately on a heap of coals, and had much ado to restrain her tears.

"Ah, that's better," said the old gentleman at length, wiping his mouth on two square yards of red handkerchief, and shifting his chair to the fire.

"Fill my pipe, give me that hassock, and hand down the whisky;" all of which directions having been silently obeyed, he proceeded with great zest to enjoy himself. "Anyone been?" said he suddenly.

"No," said his daughter untruthfully, almost jumping out of her chair.

"Well, just fill my pipe again, and give me a kiss and get to bed."

"I don't want to go yet, dear," she ventured timidly, with a sidelong glance at the cellar-door.

"You don't want to go? But I say you are to go, miss. The idea of a girl your age presuming to contradict her father. I shall have my hands full with you yet, my girl, I can see."

This innocent remark so probed the conscience of the unfortunate Amy that she gave way to tears, and goaded her rather unreasonable parent almost to the verge of fury by dropping a couple in his eye when she kissed him.

Her state of mind when she reached her bedroom was most unenviable, for she saw only too plainly that the hapless Willie would have to pass the night in his uncongenial quarters; Mr. Marjoribanks being in the laudable habit of locking the kitchen-door before retiring, and putting the key in his pocket. The outlook for Willie was not pleasant.

* * *

"You can put your hat on and come out with me," said Mr. Marjoribanks, as they sat at breakfast next morning. "We'll see about that jacket of yours."

His daughter murmured her obligations rather confusedly. She was wondering whether their small domestic would discover Mr. Lamb when she went to replenish the scuttles, and whether she would scream or not? Knowing her to be a nervous girl, she was afraid she would, and the fear made her almost frantic. She knew her father too well to venture to differ from him, or she would have stayed at home and let the prisoner out herself.

"Now," said her father, after they had got some distance on their journey, "you walk on to the shop, my dear; I've got a call to make."

He appeared to be in a high state of merriment over something or other,

"Amy," roared a voice, "have you and that girl gone mad?"

and ambled down the street with his huge face wreathed in smiles. She had barely reached the shop when he rejoined her, still in the same unusual state of good-humour, and ushered her inside with the air of a man going to buy up the whole stock-in-trade.

"What can I do for you this morning, miss?" inquired a bland shopman, approaching the couple.

"I want a jacket for my little girl," said Mr. Marjoribanks.

This was one of his daughter's greatest trials. He knew about as much of women's clothes and millinery as a tame elephant, but nothing could have persuaded him that his judgment and taste in such matters were little short of exquisite.

He was as bad in one way as a woman, for it took three shopmen about an hour to satisfy him, and then he bought such an extraordinary garment that two ladies who were looking on retired precipitately in a series of suffocating gasps. His daughter, who was brooding over the fate of the unhappy Willie, and whose mind was, therefore, possibly a little bit unhinged, cast but one glance at it, and immediately sat down in violent hysterics.

"And now you must have a hat," said the generous parent, when his daughter had recovered.

His tastes running somewhat high this morning, he purchased a magnificent broad-brimmed covering, almost hidden in feathers and roses, on which huge beetles of the most pronounced brass were presumably feeding.

"You'll astonish the neighbours," said he proudly as they left the shop. "I never saw such a hat before!"

"Nor I," said his daughter, with much feeling.

"Well, you'd better get home now," resumed the old gentleman. "I'm going to call on old Jackson; I shall soon be back."

Miss Marjoribanks needed no second bidding, and flew to the rescue of Mr. Lamb on the wings of the wind. In a very short time she stood panting at the door.

"Dinner ready?" she inquired of the small servant who opened it.

"No, miss; not yet."

"Then you had better go upstairs and lay it at once. Oh, Mary," she continued, in tones she vainly strove to calm, "where's the key of the cellar? I couldn't find it this morn-morning."

"Don't know, miss," said the girl; "I couldn't find it when the men brought the coals."

"Coals!" said her mistress. "What coals?"

"Why, the coals master sent this morning," answered the girl. "Three ton, miss, and it was all the men could do to get them in. They're right up to the cellar-door, and how we are to open it without their falling out, I don't know."

Miss Marjoribanks gave a dreadful scream, and nearly went into hysterics for the second time that morning. Recovering herself by an effort worthy of the occasion, she demanded:

"Where's Willie?"

"Who?" said the small girl in great astonishment.

"Willie—my Willie. Where is he?" said Miss Marjoribanks wildly.

"I don't know anything about your Willie," whimpered the girl, who thought her mistress was going mad. "Do you mean the youngest coal-man, miss?"

"No," said the other, her voice rising to a perfect scream. "A Mr. Lamb, who was shut in here last night. If he's in there now he's dead—oh, he's dead! Run, Mary, and get some men to come and dig him out—perhaps he is yet alive.

While the small girl was absent on her errand of mercy, the unhappy girl was on her knees vainly endeavouring to peer through the cellar keyhole.

"Willie!" she cried; "Willie, speak to me if you can—Willie!"

But no loved voice responded to her fervent appeals, and, moved to desperation, she seized a hatchet and splintered the lock. The door burst wide open, and for a few seconds it rained coal; then, as the dust cleared away, Miss Marjoribanks looked eagerly into the cellar, only to find her glance obstructed by coals piled to the very rafters.

At this moment the small servant returned with a policeman and two dustmen, whom she had secured with a shrewd eye to their shovels.

"Burglar, miss?" inquired the man in blue.

"No, a gentleman—a friend," she answered feverishly; "left in here last night. Oh, make haste and dig him out, for pity's sake!"

The dustmen at once commenced operations, and with the experience born of innumerable dustbins, worked fast and well, the small servant laboured assiduously, the constable was a host in himself, and even Miss Marjoribanks aided in flooding the lower rooms of the house with coal. Half-way through, and no signs of the missing man yet. Dustman No. 1 drew the back of his hand across his mouth, and shook his head despondingly. Dustman No. 2 drew the back of his hand across *his* mouth, and shook *his* head despondingly, and made a remark which referred to the well-known properties of malt liquor as an aid to clearing cellars and finding missing men.

The small servant, fearfully and unwholesomely interested in this tragedy in domestic life, nearly broke her small back in her efforts—and still no Willie Lamb.

The work was at its heaviest, the excitement at its height, when a terrific noise was heard on the stairs, the foot of which was blocked up by a ton and a half of best Silkstone.

"Hush!" said the constable, holding up his hand to command silence. "What was that?"

All at once ceased their labours, and the origin of the noise became apparent. It was a grievously astonished old gentleman venting his wrath, bewilderment, and indignation in the very plainest of old English, and a sudden fear fell upon all.

"Amy!" roared a hoarse voice from the stairs, "have you and that imp of a girl gone mad? What's the matter here?"

And the speaker, leaping over the uneven coals, which scrunched beneath his weight, burst into the kitchen.

"It's poor Willie, papa. He was shut in here last night, and he must be lying dead under these coals."

And the poor girl sobbed bitterly.

Mr. Marjoribanks made two or three great gulps for air, and tugged fiercely at his collar, while his red face worked convulsively. At last he got his breath and turned to his daughter.

"I let him out last night," he said, and paused from sheer incapacity to say another word.

A loud roar went up from the dustmen and the constable, in the midst of which the small servant's shrill snicker was distinctly audible.

"Why didn't you tell me, papa?" asked Amy.

"Because," said her father, shifting uneasily from one leg to the other, and glaring hideously at the grimacing dustmen "because I thought I would give you a lesson and have a joke at the same time; that's why I sent the coals in. But the joke," said the old gentlemen, tugging at his collar again, while his eyes rolled, "doesn't seem to have been quite a success."

"An' there ain't been nobody there all this time?" said the small servant.

"Go and sweep up that coal, you little villain!" said the old gentleman furiously.

"Sweep it up?" exclaimed the damsel. "My word!"

* * * * *

It has since transpired, from information received from the small servant, that the whole of the coal was ultimately restored to its proper quarters, and that Mr. Lamb has never renewed his acquaintance with them, although he has since been a constant visitor at the house. Indeed, the small servant has gone so far as to hint darkly to certain acquaintances that they need not be frightened out of their boots if they should observe a wedding-party leave the house, as she, for one, is quite prepared for it, and, what is more to the purpose, so is Mr. Marjoribanks.

William W. Jameson.

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Telling How a Good Woman's Love Found a True Resting Place.

"Do you really think that's true?" asked Stella, looking up into the dark, earnest face of Colonel Egerton, as he stood beside the piano.

She had been singing a sad, sweet, little love song, and he had been listening to the music of her voice without paying any attention to the words.

"I'm afraid I don't quite know what you mean."

"Why, I mean the words of the love song I've just been singing. Do you think they are true?"

"They are just nonsense. There's no meaning in them at all," said Bobby stoutly.

Stella had not known that he was in the room, and she gave a slight start. Bobby was a dear boy, a kind of cousin near enough to have been a friend and playmate in early days, distant enough to make a flirtation quite a pleasant amusement. Stella was fond of him, but there was no denying that he was at times a bit of a nuisance. At this moment he certainly was.

Stella was in the first raptures of hero-worship, and Randolf Egerton, V.C., was an ideal hero. Handsome, distinguished, clever, he was the very man to win a girl's fancy, and Bobby seemed a most insignificant being beside him.

"What do you think, Colonel Egerton?" she repeated, swinging round on the music-stool to face the two men.

"I think it a pretty song, sweetly sung," he rejoined, smiling.

"But do you think a first love is really the strongest? Do you think it would haunt a man all his life and prevent his ever being happy with another woman? Is a man's first love the one real, true passion of his life, or is a later love perhaps the stronger and deeper?"

"Better be a man's last love than his first," put in the incorrigible Bobby. Stella turned on him.

"Bobby, be kind enough not to interrupt. I am not talking to you *at all*."

Bobby's round, boyish face flushed, and he jumped up.

"All right, I'll be off. But the mater asked me to remind you that you are going to drive with her this afternoon."

"I had not forgotten," returned Stella with dignity, and Bobby walked off in a subdued manner.

"You've hurt young French's feelings, I'm afraid," observed Colonel Egerton, looking after the offended youth.

"Oh, it's only Bobby," said Stella carelessly. "He's a dear boy, but he's awfully dense and commonplace."

"Well, he may not be a judge of poetry, but he's a thoroughly good fellow, and you are awfully down on him," remonstrated Egerton.

"Oh, it's only Bobby," Stella repeated. "He doesn't mind. But, Colonel Egerton, what do you think about the song? Can a man's first love spoil his whole life as the song says it does?"

"Ah, I don't know that, Miss French; I hope not."

She was still sitting on the music-stool, her back to the piano. Colonel Egerton bent over her.

"I hope it isn't true," he went on. "Dear, I have learnt to love you very deeply and truly, but you are not my first love."

Stella's cheeks glowed crimson; her big blue eyes glanced up into the dark face so near her own, then fell again.

"Sweetheart, do you care for me a little bit? Shall we try and make each other happy? Say 'Yes,' darling."

Stella said nothing, but she let him draw her into his arms and cover her with kisses in a silence that seemed to give consent.

"Will you tell me about your first love?" she murmured presently. "How long ago is it?"

"My first love affair? Oh, ten years ago. I was twenty-eight, and Alice twenty-two."

"Then she'll be thirty-two now, quite old; so I needn't be jealous of her even if she did come back to try and do mischief," thought Stella, who was just nineteen, and considered thirty old age.

"She and her sister lived with an old aunt, on whose bounty they were entirely dependent. That fact, perhaps, is the key to the situation, for I am certain Alice loved me. But her aunt disapproved of our engagement. I was not very well-off in those days, you see, and Alice had another suitor, a millionaire. One day I got a note from Alice to tell me never to see her again; she had yielded to her aunt's persuasion, and accepted Leigh.

"I simply wouldn't believe it. I went off at once to see her. She was out, the servant said, but I saw her sister, May, who told me that Alice had indeed accepted Leigh. I wrote several times to Alice after that, but had no answer, so at last I gave it up. During the ten years that have passed, I have never heard her name, nor thought twice of her. She is dead to me, and I have never loved any other woman. Little one, will you try to love me, and be as true to me as she was false?"

It was a lovely little face that Stella raised to his in mute reply, and as Egerton kissed the rosy lips so sweetly, innocently offered, he felt well satisfied with his fate.

* * * * *

"Are you expecting many more guests to-day?" asked Stella, nestling down beside Mrs. French, as the two started out for their drive. The girl felt rather guilty and undeserving of her hostess' kindness, for she well knew that the petting she received was solely for Bobby's sake. She certainly had flirted with Bobby, Stella reflected, and his doting mother would no doubt be very angry when she learnt that she and Colonel Egerton were engaged.

"Well, I'm expecting two by the 4.35 train, dear, and I shall drive round by the station to meet them. I am sending to meet the 6.12, of course, for there will be quite a crowd by that train."

"Oh, of course, for the ball," cried Stella joyously. "I do love a ball."

Stella had very pretty ways with elderly people, and was

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a general favourite among them. Mrs. French looked very benevolently at her little cousin.

"I like to see young people enjoying themselves, my dear, and Bobby loves dancing. I hope you have kept him a great many dances?"

"Yes, I have a great many," replied Stella, somewhat gloomily, for as yet her *fiancé* had not asked for a single dance, and she had already given away all her waltzes. Not much more was said until the station was reached.

"Now, Stella, you will see the most beautiful young woman I have ever seen," said Mrs. French. "And what a life she must lead with that sour old aunt of hers, poor soul!"

Miss Chester certainly looked the very quintessence of vinegar, and was by no means gracious even to her hostess, while her niece and her maid were treated with the most undisguised ill-temper. The niece was really lovely, tall, dark, with exquisite colouring and perfect features. Stella could not help thinking that this stately maiden would make a more suitable bride for her soldier-hero than her insignificant little self."

"But he loves *me*," she whispered to herself, and felt comforted. She was not at all jealous of Egerton's former love, but she knew she could be very jealous of any woman he might admire in the future.

She did not happen to be present when Egerton was presented to Miss Chester and her niece, or she might have found food for jealousy at once. Egerton went white to the lips as he bowed and murmured something about having met before and Alice Chester lost her rich bloom, and trembled visibly.

* * * * *

"Why, I do believe I'm the first down."

Stella, fairly-like in her white robes, radiant in youth and happiness, stood looking round the vast empty room.

"No; I'm here," said a voice behind her, and she whisked round at once.

"Oh, it's only Bobby," she cried, disappointed. "But since you are here, I want to ask you something. Let me off the first waltz I am engaged to you for. It's the fifth dance."

Her radiant eyes were raised expectantly to his, and she laughed out like the sudden chiming of bells as she saw the change in his face.

"Oh, how cross you look, Bobby! I never saw you look so before. Don't be cross, Bobby. I never was so happy in all my life, and I mean to enjoy myself to the very utmost to-night. You'll let me off that dance, won't you, Bobby?" She touched his arm coaxingly with her white fan.

"No, I won't," said Bobby savagely. "Why should I? You want to dance it with Egerton, and I can't bear it, Stella." His voice shook, and his boyish face was drawn and white with pain. "You know what you are to me; what you've been to me from a tiny child; you know how I love you——"

"Hush, Bobby," Stella broke in. "Oh, I mustn't let you go on. I'm sorry, dear, so sorry. I like you so much; I—almost—love you, but—but—Bobby, I've told no one else, but I'll tell you. Colonel Egerton and I are engaged."

"Engaged, are you? Well," and Bobby gulped down something in his throat, "I hope you'll be happy, and that Egerton loves you even half as much as—I—do."

Stella had promised several dances to different members of the house-party, and did her duty bravely, though her heart longed for her lover. She saw nothing of him. He was not dancing, nor even in the ballroom, and she felt vaguely unhappy.

Bobby came up to her.

"Our dance, I think," he said resolutely.

"Oh, Bobby, dear, I don't want to dance. Can't we sit it out?" she said appealingly.

He saw that her lovely eyes were full of tears, and took her to a quiet nook in the conservatory.

"Let me get you a glass of wine, Stella," he said anxiously.

"Some water, please," and she leant back and closed her eyes wearily.

She was only half conscious when the sound of someone near roused her. She was completely hidden by some plants, and before she could make her presence known, Egerton's voice, low but distinct, came to her ears:

"I have granted you this interview, Miss Chester," he said sternly, "as you have asked it in the name of justice, but you can have nothing to explain. The play was played out ten years ago. I was certainly astonished to find you still Miss Chester, and I own that I am agitated at meeting again the woman I—once—so dearly—loved."

His voice faltered. Stella made an effort to break the spell that seemed to hold her and move away, but she was powerless.

"My sister is dead," began Miss Chester abruptly. "She died three years ago, and she made me promise if ever I met you again, that I would repeat to you her death-bed confession. And this is it: Mr. Leigh promised her a sum of money large enough to make her independent for life if she could bring about my marriage with him. We were miserable with our aunt, and she thought, poor May, that it would be better for me to marry a rich man than a poor one."

She paused, but there was no answer except the hurried breathing of the man at her side.

"Go on," he said hoarsely, after a moment.

"May could imitate almost any handwriting. She wrote to you as if from me, dismissing you. I had a letter, apparently from you, giving me up. She intercepted some letters on each side, and the thing was done. She could separate us—yes—but she could not make me marry any other man. And that, Colonel Egerton, is why I am Alice Chester to this day."

She rose, and with a slight bow, was moving away, but in an instant he had sprung up and caught her to his breast. Gone were the ten years of contempt and hatred, gone all recollection of the little girl for whom that very afternoon he had professed affection. He only knew that his old sweetheart was in his arms again, and that love and trust were his once more.

"Alice, my own, my darling," he cried passionately, "say that you are still my own, that you love me still!"

"Hush, hush!" she said, with a startled look round, "you forget there may be people near. Come, take me to my aunt, and tell her—tell her what you please."

They were gone, and Stella sat on, in a kind of stupor. Egerton had actually forgotten her very existence.

It was thus that Bobby found her a few minutes later, when he returned with a small assortment of refreshments. Setting the tray carefully on a seat near, he scrutinised the girl's face.

"Stella," he said in some alarm, "what's the matter? You look so queer and white. Shall I fetch Egerton?"

"No, I wouldn't do that," she returned with forced composure, "you might find some difficulty in recalling me to his remembrance. He has just found out how he was tricked into losing the girl he loved many years ago, and it's all made up. He's going to marry her and he's forgotten all about me."

To Bobby's consternation, Stella burst into tears.

"Stella, don't cry, darling. You're breaking my heart. What am I to do, dearest! I'll do anything you like, only don't cry." And here Bobby fairly took her in his arms, and comforted her as in the days gone by he had consoled her for a lost doll.

Stella made no resistance.

"I feel such a silly," she sobbed. "Why, I was engaged to him, and he's forgotten all about it. I don't care a bit for him now, but I don't like being made a fool of."

"Never mind, darling, nobody knows anything at all about it except me, and I'm nobody; only Bobby, you know."

Stella's sobs ceased, and she rested her bright head on his shoulder in a confiding way that emboldened him to go on.

"Look here, darling, I'm not a V.C., or anybody distinguished, and goodness knows I'm not a beauty, but I do love you with all my heart. Could you put up with me, sweetheart? Will you marry me, Stella? That is, if you're quite sure you don't love Egerton still."

Stella raised her head quickly, and her eyes sparkled through her tears.

"I'm quite sure I don't love him any more. I'm quite sure that in all the world I love—only Bobby."

Vera Serkoff.

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Poaching for a Heart.

A Story the Conclusion of which is Left to the Reader's Imagination.

"*Shooting on these grounds prohibited.*" A board tacked to a tree bore this warning to poachers.

She looked at him severely and pointed to the board.

"I beg pardon!"

He lifted his cap and stared at her. He had shot into a covey of birds from an adjoining field, and then leapt the fence to get the game.

"You are careless with your gun," she said.

Though startled, she was angry. He dropped the butt of his gun to the ground, and continued to stare as he might have stared at an apparition—a lovely one. An apparition might have disconcerted him more, for his look was bold. She flushed indignantly.

"You are insolent!" her glance said, as plainly as speech could have done.

"I am distressed!" he exclaimed, pausing between the words, as if speech were difficult.

"Indeed!" with a look that should have withered him, but it did not.

"You were in no danger, but I am sorry to have frightened you."

"I am not frightened."

"Oh, that relieves me."

His cool impudence exasperated her, yet his open-eyed astonishment was ludicrous. His eye did not leave her face for an instant. Was she really so beautiful that this rustic gaped in wonder? The thought softened her.

"You are not concerned about the trespass?"

"I did not see the warning."

She did not doubt that he had seen it a hundred times. She looked straight at him, partly wondering how he could tell such a story, partly thinking how handsome the sunburnt fellow was.

"Who are you, sir?"

She did not note his curious smile.

"Mr. Inglehart's nephew, Tom," he replied, with significant emphasis.

She looked no wiser.

"Mr. Inglehart lives across the valley," he added.

A farmer, was her thought. No doubt this lazy fellow lived on his bounty. Though tanned, he had not the look of a field-hand. He was a habitual poacher, she did not doubt. He wore a hunting-cap and jacket, both the worse for briers and wear; and his age might have been three-and-twenty.

"I shall tell my uncle that Mr. Inglehart's nephew has been shooting on his grounds."

"Tell him I didn't see the sign."

"I shall tell him nothing of the kind."

"Not if I didn't see it?"

"Not if you didn't."

"Do you think he will mind?"—a little anxiously.

"He had the constable arrest a man once for a similar offence."

This was a fib, pure and simple—not inexcusable, though. The fellow needed the lesson; besides, it was not certain that some culprit had not been arraigned during the ten years this weather-beaten board had given warning to poachers.

"I will give you half the birds; I suppose that will make it right?"

"I don't suppose it will! I wouldn't touch one of them. See how the poor things bleed and writhe! Others went away wounded, to suffer and die more slowly. You ought to be ashamed of your cruelty!"

His swarthy face coloured; he eyed her keenly and in surprise; then, all of a sudden, his countenance fell; he glanced ruefully at the fluttering birds.

"I suppose you do not eat birds, nor wear feathers in your hat?"—a little sullenly.

Then she coloured—deeply, too; his glance rested maliciously on the rich plume in her hat.

"Why do you stand there?" she asked impatiently, and a little disconcerted.

"Pardon me; may I tell you?" with an audacious smile.

She looked at him quickly, intently; then averted her face, a little scared. A suspicion darted across her mind—a suspicion, nothing more. In a moment it vanished, and she was angry again: yet not very angry, nor long so. The absurdity of his manner upset her temper. There was no mistaking the admiring glances of the young countryman; his admiration was as honest, too, as it was bold.

Being modest and not over-vain, she accepted this view of her charms with some grains of allowance. She knew that she had fair cheeks and dimples, brown eyes, and a dainty waist, and that people stared at her. Now, this man stared, not for want of manners, but because he could not help it. On him she had made a genuine impression. She half-wondered what the foolish youth wanted to say, but she cut him short:

"Why don't you take the birds and go?"

"I am in no hurry; they won't expect me home much before dinner-time."

"I don't like to be stared at; I came here to gather flowers. Please go."

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"I am good at gathering flowers myself; let me help you over the fence!"

In the meadow across the fence was a large pond of water-lilies; and, beyond, a wooded rocky slope, a-bloom with wild flowers.

She was uncertain whether to rebuke him with a show of greater severity for his audacity, or to accept his proffered services. She glanced at the high stone wall and at the tempting flowers, then doubtfully at him. She remembered that her uncle knew Mr. Inglehart—an old resident of the neighbourhood, of course—and this was Mr. Inglehart's nephew. His appearance was in his favour, and the water-lilies had tempted her before. They were beyond her reach, nor was it easy to get over the stone wall unaided. Should she cast aside conventionalities? He looked only a simple countryman! And she doted on water-lilies!

He read her mind.

"I got my sister a big lot of lilies yesterday."

"How did you get them?"—with interest.

"I waded."

Whether this were true or not, it settled the matter. She put out her little hand; he took it, showed her projecting stones on which she could put first one foot, then the other; by means of these and his assistance, she was speedily on the top of the wall; then he sprang over, and helped her down on the other side.

He found a shallow place in the pond, and threw in some boulders to stand on; she sat on the grass under a tree while he got the water-lilies—a great armful, more than she could carry; then he ran round the pond to the hill-side, and brought as many more flowers from there: ivy-blossoms, wild honeysuckle, sweetbrier, and a great variety beside—all of them pretty, some very sweet. She gave him a grateful look, and he sat down beside her to arrange them.

"You spoke of your sister"—suddenly—"where is she?"

"At my uncle's."

"You both live there?"

His face lighted as with an inspiration.

"At present—yes. Would you like to see her? Perhaps you find it dull in these parts."

"You think me a stranger?"

"I shouldn't think you lived here."

"Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do I look different from the country-people—from your sister, for instance?"

"I don't think she is like most people."

"You may be partial."

"You ought to see her!"

"How old is your sister?"

"Nineteen. I should like you to meet her. I could bring her here to-morrow, if you would come"—eagerly.

"Oh, she might come to my uncle's—Mr. Wayne's."

"This is a nice place." His fine eyes looked beseeching. "She comes here often," he added quickly; "it is such a pretty spot, and there are so many flowers."

She laughed softly. The slanting shadows crept over the meadows; the sun dipped behind the hills; the breeze scarcely stirred the leaves and clover-blossoms; the lull and mellow fragrance of closing day fell upon wood and field. The pair sorted the flowers, and she listened to his talk, forgetting that he was a stranger.

There is a snare in the green fields and woods, the blue skies and scented air of the country; I warn my young readers to beware of it. The young lady came to her sober self with a start and a look of dismay. The sky was tinged with twilight. What a fool she had been for having had anything to say to this man! She scowled at him, as if he were to blame. She grew confused; and, in her confusion, she did not know what they had talked about, what he had said, what she had said, or why she had stayed so long.

"I will walk home with you, if you will allow me," he ventured to say.

She declined the offer rather haughtily. He helped her over the fence, then put the big bunch of flowers in her arms.

"You need not expect me to-morrow," she said, turning away.

"My sister will be disappointed. I hope I have not offended you?"

She paused and glanced up at him, as he sat on the fence. He looked hurt. She had promised to meet his sister; this she remembered, and it was about all she did remember. Why should she change her mind so soon? She ought not to have promised!

"I think you need not expect me," she said slowly, looking straight at him, and turned away.

He watched her till she was out of sight, hoping that she might look back; but she did not.

It was nearly dusk when the young lady reached the farm-house. No notice was taken of this, however, as she was often out late in the orchard and meadows near the house. By degrees her conversation with the young stranger came back to her. She slipped into the house and upstairs to her own room, there to think it all over. At first it came distinctly, she was so confused; after a while it came vividly. Now she burnt with anger, now with vexation, that she should have so forgotten herself as to talk to this stranger. But she recalled his handsome appearance, his kindly grey eyes, his broad brow, his fine, smiling mouth almost hidden by the brown moustache, his clean-cut nose and chin, and finally his easy, unembarrassed manner. She would find out all about him.

And she said to her uncle:

"I saw a man shooting in your fields this afternoon."

"Who was the man, dear?"

"How should I know, uncle?"—dropping her eyes.

"Was he a young man?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Lord Inglehart, I expect. He's the best shot in the county."

She was silent a moment, then said:

"Who is Lord Inglehart, uncle?"

"The most popular man hereabouts, my dear, and the Lord of the Manor of Foxberry. He is on a visit to his uncle."

"John, I saw his sister to-day. You wouldn't know her," remarked Mrs. Wayne.

"Likely not; it's been nearly three years since she was here."

"Three in October. What a slim and weakly thing she was! I never saw any living thing alter so. She's the finest looking girl I ever saw. I dare say you won't believe it's she when you see her; I didn't, till she asked about you and everything about the place. She makes me think of Helen, only she's dark and half a head taller."

Helen smiled demurely.

"And a great deal more beautiful, auntie?"

"Now, that couldn't be, my child," returned the old lady, with a fond glance at her niece.

"Is she coming over?" questioned the uncle.

"Yes. I told her about Helen; and she said she would be glad to see her; she'll be great company for her."

Our heroine would doubtless have learnt much more about the Inglehart family; but at this moment a man ran in and said that a favourite horse had been hurt. The old couple hurried away, and Helen was left alone with her reflections.

The reader perhaps will be greatly surprised when I say that Helen decided, next day, to keep her appointment.

I do not know myself why she went. She may have kept the appointment on account of Tom's sister, feeling that she ought not to disappoint her. She may have planned a pleasant surprise for the old people, intending to bring her home with her, letting Tom go where he wished. If this was the case, however, she was disappointed. Tom came; his sister did not.

She was angry, very angry.

"Where is your sister?" she demanded.

"She is at home with a sprained ankle,"

The fence was between them; he rested his elbows and chin on the top stone.

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"You are making fun of me!" she exclaimed vehemently.

He stared at her like a simpleton, as she turned abruptly.

"One moment, I beg! My sister met with a serious accident. Besides the sprained ankle, she is bruised and scarcely able to be up. She was very sorry she couldn't come."

She paused, flashing upon him a look of severity and distrust.

He had pushed his cap back from his brow. His face was perfectly frank and honest, and strikingly handsome; she had not had a good view of his features before. The easy pose of his shapely head and the composure of his features were striking.

"My sister sent you a letter."

He drew a letter from his pocket, and held it towards her. She hesitated, and asked:

"Why didn't you give it to me at once?"

"I ought to have done so. Sister says I am always doing the wrong thing. Won't you please take it now?"

She still hung back, though relenting a little.

"Lottie could hardly write, her arm was so painful," he added.

She took the letter and broke the seal, drawing out a dainty perfumed sheet, written all over, with four postscripts. Helen smiled while reading it; then she glanced at him with a smile, but frowned immediately.

"Tell your sister I shall be very glad to see her, and hope she may soon be able to come."

She was going.

"One word, please!"

"I have stayed too long already. I did wrong to meet you here, to speak to you, or have anything to do with a stranger. Good day, sir."

"May I come with my sister?"

She paused to say:

"I—I do not know you."

"I shall come with my sister!" he said.

"I think it better you should not."

She was gone.

Yesterday she would have asked any number of questions about Tom Inglehart, or any member of the family; asked a little slyly, perhaps, because she had been imprudent, yet she would have asked them. But for the accident to the horse, and a lack of subsequent opportunity, she would have gone to bed on the previous night, knowing all about all the Inglcharts.

To-day her cheeks burnt, her heart palpitated; she started when she saw her aunt in the carriage drive; paled when the kindly old uncle crossed the lawn. She ran up to her room, locked herself in, lay down on the bed, and cried.

Several days went by, but no word came from the Inglcharts. Helen never mentioned the Inglehart name. Her moods were fitful; she started when she heard the tramp of horses or sudden footsteps. She wondered how his sister looked; whether the sister had got well; why she did not come; whether she would come at all, or had gone away. Sometimes Helen hoped she had gone, or would go without coming; again she felt an unaccountable desire to see her, yet dreaded her coming.

One day his sister came. How like him she was! The same smiling mouth, turned up at the corners; his broad, low brow, his deep, tender eyes; tall, dark, beautiful!

A bronzed, broad-shouldered man, clad in a riding suit, stood beside her, bowing and smiling. He was a young man, self-possessed and handsome.

Mrs. Wayne introduced his sister to Helen as Lady Inglehart, who said:

"Miss Blake, my brother Tom."

Did her eyes deceive her? Her head went round. What were they saying?

The next day he called again; she had gone to the village. He went there, too, but missed her. During the next three days he tramped the woods and fields, entered the Wayne inclosures, invaded the orchard, shadowed the house and premises, hoping to get a glimpse of her.

To detail the state of his mind, his efforts to see Helen during the next ten days would unduly lengthen this story. He persevered, however, and one day he stood before her so suddenly, that he might have dropped from the sky.

"You have been unkind!" he stammered.

"You deceived me!" she said.

She was all ice and dignity.

"Can't you forgive me?"

"I ought not even to speak to you. I thought you were a plain countryman. I took you for another person, and you did not undeceive me. Now go, if you please!"

"I told you I was Mr. Inglehart's nephew," he said. "But I did not tell any falsehood. Had I told you who I was, you would have gone away. I loved you then—I love you now! Ah, if you knew how well, you would not have the heart to frown on me. I ask but little of you—a very little now: your smile and your forgiveness!"

She ought to have been startled and angry at this bold and hasty avowal. She was neither; but, if she softened within, there was no betrayal in her manner.

"I do not think I shall ever like you," she said slowly. "Let us end this interview!" She was going, but he caught her hands.

"Put me on probation!" the rude fellow cried.

The reader sees how this story must end. Why should I go on?

Mabel Varney.

Your Editor Chats.

Men or Women?

"Do you believe," writes a Newcastle correspondent, who signs himself "L. M.," "that men write more readable short stories than women do?"

No, I don't, "L.M." That is to say, I think that a lady is quite as capable of writing a good, interesting short story as a man is. In fact, women excel in tales of a pathetic type. On the other hand, men seem to have the power of writing a humorous story in a better vein. Regular readers of this paper will have noticed that there are usually quite as many tales in a number from the pens of ladies as there are from those of the sterner sex. I can assure "L. M." that there are no fewer women aspiring to literary fame than there are men.

Next Week's Cover.

IT may interest my readers to know that next week's cover will not illustrate an incident from a story, but it will be a strikingly pretty pictorial one. Look out for it in the newsagents' windows and on the bookstalls.

"Kindly Spare a Trifle."

How often have you seen or heard spoken the above words? Many and many a score of times, I have no doubt. But never have you heard the words in connection with a more deserving institution than Pearson's "Fresh Air Fund," which is doing its level best to cheer the hearts of the poor children of the slums by giving them a day in the country.

The costs of the railway journey and the required food for one whole day necessitate an expenditure of ninepence on each child; that is what I want you to bear in mind. If you contribute ninepence you know you are giving one grateful child a much-needed day in the green fields and open air. All the expenses of management are borne by the promoters.

Subscriptions should be sent to the Honorary Secretary, "Fresh Air Fund," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., who will send collecting forms to any who would care for them.

Your Editor.

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The Spitfire.

The Tale of a Terrible Temptation.

"I'm afraid I've been a terrible trouble to you of late, dear."

There was a little pathetic note in Cora's musical voice as she uttered the words.

"Don't talk nonsense!" replied her sister, putting down the coffee-pot with no gentle hand. "I hate to listen to such rubbish! You've been ill, and we've had to make the best of it, that's all, and there's an end of the matter!"

Cora sighed. There was little sympathy in the reply. And yet the invalid instinctively felt that her sister's brusqueness was merely surface deep.

"All right, dear," she said gently. "I won't offend again. But you've been very good to me, Hilda. I only wish we could have contrived to keep out of debt."

"Debt!" exclaimed her sister sharply, yet with an alert glance at Cora's pale face. "Who said we were in debt?"

Cora smiled.

"I did," she replied. "I know only too well that my illness has plunged you into difficulties, and——"

But Hilda stopped her with a gesture.

"Then let me tell you," she said decisively, "that we are in nobody's debt. So don't worry your head any more over things that do not exist. I've seen you fretting for days about something. I suppose this is the explanation?"

She stirred her coffee vigorously and looked questioningly across at her sister. Cora nodded guiltily.

"I couldn't help it, dear," she admitted. "But you can't have paid everything out of your salary. The doctor's bill itself must have been a heavy one. And—and it is not over yet."

Her voice ended in a little tremulous shake. Hilda's white teeth met the red line of her curved lip. She was not the sort of girl to display feeling.

"I've settled everything," she affirmed doggedly. I—I've been doing a little extra work at the office, and made it up that way. But that's my business, not yours. All you have to do is to get well and set to work yourself. Your book is nearly finished. Not that *that* will do any good, for publishers are slippery people and difficult to hook. So don't count on that. And, anyhow, the book can wait. As I said just now, what you have to do is to get well."

She rose and pushed her chair away.

"I'm off now," she said, as she pinned on her hat. "I hope the day won't drag with you. Good-bye. And don't be so silly as to continue a speculation that has positively no foundation."

She stooped to kiss her sister, and the latter put her thin arms impulsively about her neck.

"Good-bye, sis," she said caressingly. "It's a great weight off my mind to hear you say we are in no debt. I'm afraid I *was* fretting about it. And I can't make out how you've contrived to manage. Oh, dear, what should I do without you?"

The tears were in her eyes as she kissed Hilda's cheek. But the latter disengaged the clinging arms, and, once more bidding her good-bye, went downstairs and out into the street.

Once outside she walked quickly, as though the fever of her thoughts communicated its influence to her feet. The journey to the office was not a short one, but even a twopenny 'bus was a luxury nowadays in which she dared not indulge. Her salary, as such salaries go, was not a small one. But her sister's illness had drained her resources and left her, despite her dogmatic assertions to the contrary, irretrievably and hopelessly in debt.

The more she considered their position, the more heart-breaking it became to the struggling girl. And yet, cost what it would, the difficulty must be overcome before her sister could become aware of its existence.

There was a frown on her dark face as she hurried along the busy thoroughfares. Yet she held her head erect and gazed straight before her, as though defying the world to crush her, as it seemed likely to do, by this most sordid of all earthly burdens—debt. For she was proud to a degree. Patience, resignation, fortitude, were not virtues likely to weigh with Hilda Gray. Fate and Fortune might harass her at every turn, but, right to the very end, she would defy them all, and then—grow desperate.

And she was even now reaching the limit of defiance and turning the corner into that other and dreaded path that leads no one knows whither. She had been brusque with her sister—almost domineering—yet she loved her with an infinite tenderness—a tenderness so deep and real that she dared not allow it utterance. It was kinder to appear cross rather than betray the truth—the bitter, heart-breaking truth—that she was in debt. Her very love for her sister demanded that she should keep *that* from her, whatever happened.

And yet—how was she to conceal it? Those dreadful bills would soon come pouring in, and then—— She dared not think of it. Cora's illness had been a serious one, and she was even now liable to a dangerous relapse. The doctor had said as much when he had ordered her to be kept quite and free from the smallest worry or anxiety. The frown deepened on Hilda's dark face as she thought of it. She *must* find some way to pay off those horrible debts. But how could she get the money?

Her brow had not cleared when she entered the office. But the small, delicately-shaped head was even higher than usual, and, as the door of the private office closed behind her, and she took her place at the typewriter, the general opinion of the clerks in the outer office was that "Spitfire seemed more than commonly unapproachable to-day." She had been secretly dubbed "Spitfire" from the first day of her coming. One or two had attempted to scrape acquaintance with her, but her replies were so short and her manner so coldly aggressive that no one attempted it twice. She was there, she said, for business, not for gossip, and the clerks took the hint.

Even in the inner office her manner was far from attractive. Her employers were both young men, who treated her with respect and consideration. But she appeared not to notice this, much less allow herself to be touched by it. She took her instructions both from Lionel and Victor Leighton, though, as Lionel, the elder brother, undertook the bulk of

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the firm's correspondence, she came into more frequent contact with him than with Victor. Lionel Leighton was a man of two or three and thirty, with clear grey eyes, a firm, square chin, and a look of quiet dignity and reserve. He was abnormally fond of the study of character, and in Hilda Gray he had great opportunities for indulging this *penchant*. And the result? Well, we shall see.

Slowly the day wore on. Listening to the clear, decisive voice of Lionel Leighton as he dictated the outgoing correspondence, typing with a rapidity that astonished even herself, yet always thinking, thinking of those dreaded debts and the still greater dread of their coming to the knowledge of her sister, whom she, with all her brusqueness, loved so dearly.

Lionel watched her with new interest. Something in the troubled yet defiant face of the girl touched him strangely. Some secret, he could see, was eating out her heart — a secret which, despite the proud poise of her small head, was none the less potent in its hidden bitterness. He tried in vain to divine its cause. That she and her sister were orphans, he knew well enough, but of that sister's recent illness he had not been told.

So, unable to fathom the trouble which he knew to be there, he could only watch and wait until a favourable opportunity gave him the chance of asking her if he could be of service to her. But before that opportunity came, an incident occurred that sent a chill to his very soul, and, with it, the knowledge that, almost unknown to himself, he had loved this proud, defiant girl who told no one her difficulties and asked the sympathy of none.

Swiftly she took the note, but she had been detected by Lionel Leighton.

It was early in the afternoon. Victor, the younger brother, was still at lunch, and the two were alone. Lionel was busy over a calculation in one of [the firm's private ledgers. Presently he closed the book, and, turning to some papers that lay before him, spoke mechanically to the girl at her machine.

"Miss Gray," he said, "would you mind replacing this ledger in the safe? It is open, I think."

Hilda was accustomed to carry the smaller books to and from the safe when not otherwise employed, and she rose to comply with the request. Lionel immediately became immersed in his work. Taking up the ledger, Hilda went up to the safe and opened the heavy door. As she replaced the book in its accustomed position her eye fell on a small fixed cash-box in one corner of the safe.

She knew quite well what was in there. It was the custom of the firm to keep a little ready money in case of emergency, and the amount never varied. Nearly two years' experience had taught her the habits of the firm by whom she was employed. At the bottom of the cash-box lay the sum of thirty pounds in gold, and above this one twenty pound, three ten pound, and four five pound Bank of England notes. There *had* been an emergency once, when Victor suddenly wanted a sum of fifty pounds after closing hours at the bank, and ever since that occasion he had adopted the present means of avoiding a recurrence of the inconvenience arising therefrom. It all rose up in the girl's mind now as she quietly slipped the ledger back in its place. All in a moment the temptation surged within her to take the means at her command.

Never before had she felt how fierce and almost irresistible is the voice of the tempter, when to yield means freedom from further anxiety. Alas, she did not pause to consider what that other anxiety would be—the anxiety that springs from wrong-doing.

Lionel was absorbed in his papers. Once again the temptation surged within her.

For a moment or two she struggled to free herself, and then, alas! it overwhelmed her. The lid was not locked.

Lifting it quietly, and with one swift glance behind her, she drew forth one of the white, crisp notes and hid it in her chatelaine. Then, with heaving bosom and kindling cheeks, she went back to her seat.

But the soft rustle of the note had reached the ear of Lionel Leighton. Raising his head, he had just been in time to witness the lowering of the lid of the cash-box, and a horrible dread of what had occurred entered his heart. But he controlled himself with an effort and again brought his eyes back to the papers before him. But he could not work now. She —a thief! The thought cut him to the heart. What must he do? He could not accuse her. And yet—why not? And then he knew the truth. He loved her. The thought that she was a thief tortured him and would not let him rest. He picked up a letter and turned to her.

"I want a letter written," he said in a strange, husky voice,

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and Hilda prepared to type the required communication.

And as she worked he watched her, marvelling at the change, and reading the signs of shame and guilt in the heightened colour of her cheek and the nervous twitching of her fingers. But that was not all. For the first time since he had known her the proud, defiant little head had lost its erectness. When the letter was finished he sent her into the general office to search for some past correspondence.

As soon as the door had closed behind her, he slipped to the safe and examined the contents of the cash-box. The twenty pound note was not there. With a heavy heart he returned to his seat and tried to think. Oh, why had she not told him she needed money? What was he to do? If Victor went to the safe, he would discover the loss—and then! The thought made him shiver.

Hilda came back with the letters in her hand, but he scarcely noticed her. And then an idea came to him—an idea that swiftly merged into a resolve.

If he loved her, he must save her. Taking out his private cheque-book, he drew a cheque for twenty pounds, payable to bearer. Then he locked the safe, put on his hat, and drove round to the bank. When he returned, Hilda was still alone in the office. There were traces of tears in her dark eyes, and he sent her again into the general office on some pretext. Then swiftly he unlocked the safe, opened the cash box, and placed a new twenty pound note within. He had barely reached his seat when his brother returned, and the business of the day was resumed.

All that afternoon Hilda sat at her table, suffering the torments of remorse. Had Lionel left the safe open while he went to the bank she would have replaced the note. But, once taken, she could not draw back, and the guilt and shame of what she had done tortured her almost beyond endurance. To confess would mean open disgrace, perhaps—perhaps a prison cell! And then—her sister! She dared not even think of it. The shock would kill Cora. Poor Cora! And so the day wore on till once more the clerks filed out and the day's work drew to a close. Victor was the first to leave. Ten minutes later Lionel put on his hat and prepared to depart. As he passed the girl he paused and looked gravely down into her face.

"Miss Gray," he said, "you have not been yourself to-day. Is anything the matter? Believe me, I would do anything—anything in my power to help you. Can't you trust me?"

His voice was deep, resonant and rich, with a note of earnest sympathy underlying it. For one moment the girl wavered. A wild desire to confess her guilt before it was too late flashed through the tormented brain. But the awful possibilities of exposure recurred to her, and she answered doggedly, though her dark face twitched with nervous pain:

"Thank you. I need no help."

Lionel sighed and went quietly out of the office. Hilda dropped her head upon her hands and great tearless sobs rose in her throat. But she controlled herself with a great effort The thing was done now, and must be got through with. Hurrying out, she cashed the note and made a tour of her creditors, paying their bills one by one. It was late when she reached the little flat in which she and Cora lived, and of the twenty-pound note but three pounds remained. Cora looked up as she entered.

"You're late, dear," she said. "More overtime?"

Hilda nodded and began bustling about, tidying the little room. She spoke little, and Cora watched her attentively. And then, for the first time, she noticed that Hilda's cheeks were paler than of old and that the slim figure was thin, Constant attention on her sick sister, together with the ever-accumulating anxiety as to their needs, had told on Hilda's vigorous constitution. And now that other trouble was hitherto added to the list, and the shame of it was crushing her very soul. But she bore up. Week after week went by. Cora grew strong again and finished her book—the novel in which all her hopes had been centred. And she had sent it to a firm of publishers. Day by day she waited eagerly for their reply, hoping and fearing alternately. And day by day the anxious, tortured look on her sister's dark face deepened, though Cora saw it not. The girl was bewildered. Twice Victor had looked through the cash-box in the great safe, yet he had made no comment. Was it possible he could have overlooked the missing note? She could not account for it. Mechanically she performed her daily duties, strung up to the highest pitch of nervous apprehension. And when each night she returned to her home it was to pass a sleepless night tormented with the fear of what the morrow might bring.

And then two things happened. Cora's book was accepted. The publishers had made her a handsome offer for its purchase and praised the work she had done. Money was now theirs in plenty, and Cora's heart beat high with exultation.

But a new shadow was soon to fall. Poor overwrought Hilda found herself unable to rise from her bed one morning. There was a deep red flush on her cheeks and a strange light in her dark eyes. The doctor was sent for and pronounced her to be suffering from an attack of brain fever.

Cora dispatched a note to Leighton Brothers, acquainting them with the circumstance, and, in reply, came a kindly note from Lionel, expressing his sympathy and intimating that her place would remain open until her recovery. As it chanced to be the first of the month, he inclosed Hilda's salary, and begged her to accept a few flowers which he would send later on. Hilda flushed as she read the note, and when the flowers arrived, turned away from them with a gesture of mute distress.

And then that terrible delirium that so often accompanies brain fever set in, and the sick girl began to talk of things that made her sister reel as though a sudden blow had been dealt her. But she remained quite still. With a patience touching to witness, she nursed the invalid girl back to health. And all through those five long weeks not a day went by that did not bring some kindly offering from Lionel Leighton.

Then Hilda began to mend and was able to leave her bed and sit in a chair by the window of their little sitting-room.

One day a letter arrived at the office of Leighton Brothers, marked "Private." Opening it, Lionel read aloud the following request:—

"Gentlemen,—*Can you make it convenient to call upon us some time to-day? My sister and I have something to communicate to you, the nature of which is as grave as it is important. Faithfully yours,* "Cora Gray."

A puzzled look came into Victor's face as he listened, but upon that of Lionel rested an expression of distress. What that letter portended he knew but too well. He must do something to avoid it. Yet what could he do? Cora, too, was in the secret. The next to know would be his brother. His brows contracted at the thought. Was there no way out? All day long he pondered, and towards the close of the afternoon the two brothers made their way to the flat where Hilda and her sister resided. Cora's face was very pale as she preceded them into the room where Hilda was sitting. At the first glance Victor seemed fascinated by Cora's gentle and refined face. From time to time, and in spite of the, to him, strangeness and incomprehensibility of the conversation, his eyes wandered back to her face. Lionel watched him and marvelled. As soon as all were seated and the brothers had made their usual solicitous inquiries as to the invalid's progress Hilda, whose dark face had grown suddenly white, began to speak.

"I have something to tell you," she said. "A few months ago my sister was ill. We ran heavily into debt. I did my best, but there was no help for it. My sister began to fret about it, and I knew the anxiety would impede her recovery. One day I stood at the safe in the private office. Mr. Lionel was in the office, and he was very busy. I knew where you kept the notes, and—and I took one. It was for twenty pounds, and with it I paid all our debts. But the thought of it has tormented me day and night. In my delirium I revealed the truth and my sister heard it. It is now our duty to repay the money, after which I am ready to suffer whatever punishment you deem just."

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Cora took a little packet from the mantelpiece and counted out twenty sovereigns upon the table. Victor looked from one to the other in blank astonishment.

"My dear Miss Gray," he said, in utter bewilderment, "I cannot for the life of me comprehend what you are saying. Why, it is scarcely three weeks since I had occasion to use the hundred pounds we keep in the safe, and I assure you the precise sum was there. I don't understand. You say my brother was in the office when you took the money?" And he turned to Lionel in mute amazement.

But Lionel was looking straight into Hilda's dark eyes. His face was calm, yet with an expression of wondrous sympathy in the clear grey eyes.

"Miss Gray," he said gently, "did it never occur to you that this delusion may have been the first symptom of the malady from which, for upwards of five weeks, you have suffered? I know something of these things, and, believe me, this is the correct explanation of the otherwise astonishing statement you have just made. The firm has lost no money. My brother would quickly have discovered it if we had. It is all a delusion, which, in order to get well again, you must endeavour to forget as speedily as possible."

It was now Hilda's turn to look bewildered.

"But our debts were all paid!" she persisted. "I have the receipted bills to prove it."

Lionel smiled. There was something very convincing and masterful in his treatment of the matter.

"That is not remarkable," he said. "Most honest people pay their debts. Believe me, you have been the victim of some hideous hallucination. If there were the least grain of truth in your statement we should have discovered it long ago. Now let the matter rest. It is absurd to talk of it any more." And he pushed the money back to Cora Gray.

For a moment or two there was silence in the little room. But it was clear that both Victor Leighton and Cora Gray had accepted Lionel's view of the matter without question. Hilda, however, was slow to believe it. The remembrance was too real, the shame too keen. Yet if her story were true, how came it that no discovery followed the theft of the note? The more she debated the question, the more hopelessly involved did she become, and finally she gave it up in very despair.

Presently Cora and Victor left the room together. Victor was anxious to ask the girl what she thought of her sister's recovery. This new development had shattered their recent hopes. And Lionel was left alone with Hilda. Going up to her, he stood quietly by her chair.

"Hilda," he said, "I wonder if you could care for me? You are so difficult to approach." And he smiled down at her with a twinkle in his deep grey eyes. "Even the clerks call you 'Spitfire.' But I have studied you from the first day of your coming into our office. And I have learnt to love you very dearly."

There was a sudden suspicious flash in Hilda's dark eyes as she lifted them to his face.

"Is *that* the reason you covered up my sin?" she asked fiercely.

Upon his answer depended hers, and Lionel knew it.

"I covered up no sin," he said decisively. "You must forget the delusion as soon as ever you can."

"It is not a delusion!" The words came fiercely.

"It *is* a delusion."

His tone was calm, and he looked her squarely in the face. With a little sigh, Hilda let her eyes fall before his, and he lifted one thin hand to his lips.

"Hilda," he pleaded, "don't say no to me, dear. Say you will be my wife. Trust me."

The fierceness was gone now. Even the old defiance seemed to have deserted her. The voice of her own heart was crying aloud:

"I love him—yes, I love him!"

She did not resist when he lifted her in his arms and kissed her.

"Now make haste and get well," he said tenderly. "You will come to me soon, won't you?"

And she promised him.

And six months later Lionel heard the news, for which he was quite prepared, that his brother Victor had proposed to, and been accepted by, Hilda's blue-eyed sister Cora. The day that witnessed their double wedding was bright and sunny, and to this day Lionel persists in affirming that people with brain fever sometimes begin by deluding themselves into the belief that they have stolen something which does not belong to them.

Walter J. Mowbray.

A Little Interloper.

Telling How She Wasn't in the Way at All.

Betty was making cakes.

Anything more absolutely bewitching than Betty engaged in domestic labours cannot be imagined. A dainty white apron covered her blue serge frock, the sleeves of her bodice were pushed up to her shoulders, revealing snowy, rounded arms, her cheeks were flushed to a lovely rose in her earnestness, and her pretty eyes shone with the joy of success as she turned and tossed the dainty bits of pastry.

"I do love cooking," she cried gleefully. "It's delicious. I feel just like Ruth Pinch making the beef-steak pudding in 'Martin Chuzzlewit,' you know, Diana. Only there is no John Westlock to come in and see me."

"It's to be hoped not," somewhat gloomily responded her cousin, who was watching operations with disfavour, while, at the same time, she deftly trussed a fowl. "Considering you've sent out our one and only domestic for more eggs—and what you want with them is beyond me—it is to be hoped that no John Westlock or John Anybody will call till she gets back."

"Why not?" retorted Betty, dropping the last cake into its place, and beginning to strip the dough from her fingers. "I should open the door, disguised as Martha. Why, there's a knock at this very moment. I'll go, Di."

"It's most likely someone for father, and he's out. I'll go and see. You ridiculous girl," for Betty had snatched up Martha's cap, and was pinning it firmly on her brown curls; "do you really think that you look like a general servant in that cap and apron? You look like a maid on the stage or in private theatricals. Don't go."

But Betty had dashed out of the kitchen, her high heels going pitter-patter down the passage, and in another moment she had opened the door.

"Is your master at home?" asked a man's voice, and, to Diana's indignant horror, she heard her cousin make

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demure response in the affirmative, imitating the absent Martha's voice.

"Yes, sir. Please come this way."

There was a sound of feet in the hall, of opening and shutting a door, and then Betty danced in, bubbling over with pretty, girlish mirth.

"You little wretch," cried Diana, "what do you mean? That was Dr. Hartley's voice I heard. He wants to see father, not me."

"I know it," giggled Betty. "He asked for my master, so you see I do look just like a proper housemaid."

"He's so short-sighted as to be almost blind. But why did you bring the poor old man in? I shall have to go and tell him that father is out."

"Because there was a young man with him," promptly rejoined Betty; "a nice young man; a—listen, Diana," impressively—"a most charming young man. Now, just trot into the drawing-room and say the maid was mistaken, for uncle is out. Then I shall come in, and you shall introduce that dear young man to me. I saw him in church on Sunday. He looked hard at you, I noticed, and then even harder and more admiringly at me," concluded Betty modestly.

Diana's clear pallor suddenly changed to carnation colour, and she turned angrily aside.

"I suppose I must make the best of it," she said unwillingly, "and go and explain. You had better put those cakes in the oven at once or they'll be as heavy as lead."

"Then the boys may eat them," said Betty heartlessly. "Diana, I shall change my dress, and they won't recognise me, will they?"

"Dr. Hartley may not, as he's nearly blind and all but stone deaf, but Geoffrey Musgrave's eyesight and hearing being perfect, I don't see how he can possibly help recognising you. I advise you not to come in."

And Diana walked away with her head in the air.

When Mrs. Saville wrote to her brother-in-law, begging him to take charge of her only child for the winter while she went to India, the kindly rector was perfectly willing to comply.

Diana was not altogether delighted. She had reigned in the old rectory ever since her mother's death, and did not at all relish the idea of another girl coming to possibly share her dominion over father, brothers, curates, and parish. Besides, Mrs. Saville had not taken the smallest notice of them for many years, and Diana resented her aunt's making a convenience of them.

Nor were her young brothers better pleased. What, they demanded, were they to do with a stuck-up, fine lady? However, Mr. Tracy had made up his mind, and, accordingly, Betty came, saw, and conquered. From the Rector himself to his youngest boy, from the curates to the organist, everyone with whom Betty came in contact, fell in love with her, and even Diana, who had looked upon her as an interloper, could not resist her charm.

She was very pretty; a slim little thing with a sweet, innocent, baby face, big, wondering brown eyes, a pink-and-white complexion, and a mass of nut-brown curls.

Diana was taller than her cousin, and had more regular beauty of feature, but her face lacked colour and animation. Her eyes were lovely, a clear, dark grey, and she had quantities of soft dark hair, without curl or wave in it.

She looked very dignified as she greeted her unlooked-for guests.

"I am sorry my cousin misled you," she went on uncompromisingly. "My father is out, and will not be home until late."

"That was your cousin, Miss Saville, who opened the door, wasn't it?" asked Geoffrey Musgrave eagerly.

"Yes," answered Diana, with a queer little pain at her heart. "The maid is out, so Betty went to the door, and put on Martha's cap for fun. You wanted my father?"

"We did; on some business," replied Dr. Hartley ponderously, "and, as he is not here, we will no longer detain you."

Geoffrey's looks plainly indicated a desire to remain, but for once Diana felt inhospitable, and even betrayed an inclination to hustle her visitors out. While Dr. Hartley, however, was still apologising and explaining, the door opened, and Betty appeared; Betty, radiant in a white silk blouse, with a knot of blue ribbon in front and another among her brown curls; Betty with laughter in her sunny eyes and on her rosy mouth.

Diana introduced the visitors with unwonted austerity of manner, adding hastily:

"As father is not at home, they are just going."

But Geoffrey rebelled.

"Dr. Hartley is just going," he corrected mildly. "He has business to attend to, but as I have none, I will remain and have tea and a chat with you. Why, I've seen nothing of you since I came back from Paris, except that peep in church. Miss Saville, intercede for me. Your hard-hearted cousin wants to turn me out."

"You *shall* stay," Betty assured him, with gentle friendliness, while Diana conducted the old doctor to the door. "Sit down and make yourself at home, and I will protect you. You shall have tea presently, and the most delicious cakes you ever tasted. I made them myself, and they are quite delightful."

"I don't know about that," observed Diana, returning from the hall, and joining the other two, who already, to her jaundiced eye, appeared to be deep in a flirtation. "Unless you put those cakes in the oven before you came in, I don't expect they will be eatable."

"But I *did* put them in the oven," triumphed Betty, "and Martha had come in and promised to attend to them, so they'll be all right. Let's have tea soon, Di, there's a darling, for I'm perfectly ravenous."

If Betty had calculated on Diana retiring to superintend the tea-making and leaving her free to enjoy her flirtation with Geoffrey, her calculations were correct. After a little more conversation, Diana went away to order tea, and if more than one hot tear splashed down on the tea-tray she was daintily arranging, there was no one to notice it.

She had felt rather sore over Betty's prompt adoption into the family. It had been hard to see her father lavishing the tenderness which had always been so specially hers upon this little interloper, and she had resented the hearty affection with which her young brothers soon came to regard their cousin. But the secession of Geoffrey Musgrave was the bitterest drop in her cup of woes. Geoffrey had been her own special friend since the day the fourteen-year-old schoolboy had found the little maiden, barely eight years old, asleep on her mother's grave, and had carried her to Musgrave Hall, to be petted and comforted by his parents.

Diana went back to the drawing-room, followed by Martha with the tea. The cakes turned out a success, done to a turn, and light as a feather.

"The most delicious cakes I ever tasted," solemnly pronounced Geoffrey, stretching out his hand for another. "Miss Saville, you are a genius."

"You are a greedy, grasping person," cried Betty gaily, snatching away the plate. "Why, you have had *seven* already. Diana, do have another before they are all gone."

Diana was doing her best to be bright and cheerful, but she was not very successful, and the two laughed and chattered together as if they had been old friends. Her heart swelled within her as she watched Geoffrey's admiring glances at her cousin, and heard his ringing laugh at Betty's nonsense. She had never been able to amuse him like that, she thought bitterly, and the dull pain at her heart grew more intense.

* * * * *

"You are going to help us with the church decorations, I hope, Betty?"

Before Betty could answer her uncle, a chorus of intreaties burst out.

"Oh, do, Betty; it will be such fun," cried her boy cousins simultaneously.

"Miss Saville has such taste that her help will be most valuable," added one of the curates, who had dropped in, ostensibly to consult his rector on some parish business, really to look languishingly at Betty.

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"If Miss Saville would but take directions of the whole, her taste would insure the decorations this year being an undoubted success," chimed in the other curate, who had come unprovided with any reason for his visit except the obvious one—to worship Betty.

"And the flowers sent by Mrs. Musgrave,' of Musgrave Hall, are so exquisitely beautiful that only Miss Saville's fingers are worthy to arrange them," observed the first curate, with a fatuous smile, and his head cocked sentimentally on one side.

Diana felt a wild inclination to box the ears of both curates, but, restraining herself nobly, she merely suggested that they had better begin early next day, so as to complete the decorations, if possible, by daylight. If Betty chose to help, they would finish all the sooner.

Accordingly, the cousins set out for church almost directly after breakfast on the following morning.

Diana and Betty were the only young girls present. Two old maids and a middle-aged widow were the only other ladies who had put in an appearance, and they worked steadily on, while Betty flitted about like a will-o'-the-wisp, carrying in her train all the men helpers, including Geoffrey Musgrave.

Diana felt so thoroughly out in the cold that she retired into a dark corner and fashioned yards of evergreen rope-work in resentful dignity.

It was growing dark when most of the workers began to think of lunch, and very soon nobody was left except Betty, Geoffrey, and Diana. The two former were busily at work on the same wreath, and eagerly conversing as they worked. In the silence that followed the exit of the boys, Diana caught one or two sentences.

"But, mother—I don't know what mother will say," said Betty.

"You leave your mother to *me*," returned Geoffrey, in his masterful way. "She won't refuse *me*. But the question is this—is your love strong enough to brave all obstacles? Is it real, true love, or——"

Diana knocked down a pile of prayer-books, and went into a fit of coughing. She could not be guilty of eavesdropping.

* * * * *

An imperative tap sounded on Diana's door.

"Come in," she called.

Betty entered, radiant, in floating robes of the softest pale blue.

"How sweet you look, Diana," she exclaimed; "I like you best in white."

"Do you?" coldly returned her cousin. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I only came for a little chat," said Betty. "But you look so pale and sad, dear. Is there anything wrong?"

"Nothing," answered Diana, in rather a choked voice. "I've never seen that frock before. It's very pretty, but isn't it rather grand for home wear?"

"Geoffrey is coming this evening," murmured Betty, with a lovely blush and down-cast eyes, "and—and perhaps—someone else."

"Geoffrey—you dress for Geoffrey?" cried Diana. "Oh, Betty, why need you have taken him from me? You have so much; why take *all* from me? I don't so much mind father and the boys, and I don't care at all for the curates, but, Geoffrey—if you had not come, he would have loved me. And now you have made me betray myself. Oh, go away—go away, you—you—you *interloper!*"

"Now you have made me betray myself," cried Diana. "Go away, you *interloper!*"

Betty stood petrified.

"Good gracious!" she ejaculated, after a pause. "Diana, you surely don't think——"

"Think? I *know*," broke in Diana passionately. "I heard you—talking—you and Geoffrey—in the church. Oh, go away! Haven't you humiliated me enough? Go away."

And Betty went.

Diana appeared at dinner, composed and dignified as ever, and only Betty, glancing furtively at her cousin now and then, noticed the pale cheeks and faint redness round the eyes. Betty herself was restless and disturbed in manner, and after the rector had retired to his study, and the boys had dispersed to their own pursuits, she flitted about the drawing-room in a nervous way that highly irritated Diana.

A little later Betty ran across the room with outstretched hands to meet Geoffrey Musgrave, who had just entered. Diana retreated behind some curtains.

A second later Geoffrey parted the curtains.

"Are you here, Diana? That's right; I want a talk with you."

"But where's Betty?" asked Diana.

"Betty is settling matters with Clifford," replied Geoffrey.

"Clifford!" repeated Diana faintly.

"Yes, Clifford Musgrave, my cousin, you know. It seems that he and Betty were engaged, but her mother managed to separate them, and bring about a misunderstanding. Poor old Cliff hasn't much money, you see, and Betty's mother didn't like the marriage, so she packed the poor girl off here to keep her out of Cliff's way. Betty confided in me, and I undertook to clear matters up. I've done it, and now, Diana, I want to do the same with my own affairs. Why have you been so cold to me lately?"

"I thought—Betty—you seemed," faltered Diana.

"You were jealous, in fact. That must mean that you love me a little bit. Darling, say you love me."

And Diana said it.

Eva Prosser.

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A Mercenary Wooing.

Showing How Dane Provyn Sought to Retrieve his Fortune, and what came of the Attempt.

"THAT is a pleasant piece of intelligence, certainly!" observed the elder man, Mark Provyn. His tone was quiet, but there was much bitterness in it. "So it comes to this, Dane—the business is as good as smashed up, all in two years."

"I am sorry to say that you have stated the fact exactly," responded the younger man, Dane Provyn, who was nearly twenty-four. His answer was given flippantly.

"I am fifteen years your senior," continued his brother. "I worked that business up from nothing; I thought that I could give you a chance, for I always liked you, although you were a kind of scapegrace. I left some of my money in it, feeling that it would help you, and believing that the interest on that money and on my other investments would just enable me to live very quietly for the remainder of a life that is not likely to be long. And now, when this complaint is getting a firmer hold on me and is steadily incapacitating me, you come to tell me that the business is gone to the dogs."

"To the creditors," interposed Dane suavely. "It is not very polite to call them dogs; they wouldn't like it, I'm sure, if they heard you."

"I worked for the money like a horse; you have spent or wasted it like an ass," cried the elder, losing his self-possession for the time.

His cheeks became flushed with anger. "I tell you what it is, Dane," he went on warmly; "you owe it to me to return that money to me—my share, I mean—and if you have any single spark of manliness in you, if you have not become so soddened with your own selfishness, you will see to it that the creditors are paid in full and that *I* am paid in full also, thus relieving my name from any stigma and myself from poverty at a time when I most need to have a small competence."

Mark Provyn's face was glowing now. He half rose from his chair, but fell back again with a great sigh. Raising his hand, he waved it towards the door. "Leave me now; I can't bear the sight of your callous face just now. Come to me to-morrow, when you have had time to think over what you have done," he cried.

Dane was on the point of uttering another flippant remark, but some unaccountable feeling took possession of him and the words died away on his lips. Bother the man! Why did he go on in that strain? If the business could—that is, if he, Dane, was to be expected to—— Somehow, he couldn't find the excuse which he wished for in order to shield himself. He wished to pose as an injured individual, but he did not see his way to assume that *role*, even in his own mind. Confound things! For almost the first time in his life he felt uncomfortable with a sense of guilt. He surveyed his brother, whose face betrayed pain; he understood that Mark had had one of those sharp attacks, and he experienced a sensation of dejection.

"Look here, Mark, old fellow!" he began remorsefully. "I'm awfully sorry, but I don't see how it could have been averted. Anyhow, it's done. So now I must see what else I can do. There is enough to pay all the creditors twenty shillings in every pound, so that needn't lie on your mind; but there won't be any for you and me when they are all paid. I wish I knew what to do. I wish some heiress would fall in love with me and no questions asked; that would be an easy way to the top of Fortune Hill, and I don't see much chance of my ever getting there by any other road. Yes, yes," he added, as his brother moved one arm impatiently; "I'll go now."

Mark's expression changed as Dane moved towards the door; those last words of his careless brother had aroused an idea.

"What about Miss Royston?" he articulated faintly. "You ought to stand a good chance there. Think of it. Try it."

Dane Provyn started, hestitated a moment, and then turned and walked back to his brother.

"I believe there's something in that, by Jove!" he said slowly. "I *will* think about it. Good night."

In another minute he was in the street, and half an hour later he was in his own lodgings, but exactly how he got there he could not have explained, for his mind had been full of his brother's suggestion and the thought to which it gave rise.

"Mark is right," he agreed, as he threw himself heavily into a chair. "In the circumstances, I ought to stand a good chance. And she will be worth a mint of money when the old fellow retires from this vale of tribulation. I had the good luck to pull him away from the front of a 'bus that would probably have knocked him down and spoilt his appearance, so he would be charmed to have me for a son-in-law—perhaps! I expect he is on the look-out for a titled husband for her, but she is possibly romantic and would fall in love with her father's heroic rescuer. I flatter myself that I am good-looking, although I have nothing else that is good about me."

He rose and surveyed himself in the glass. It was no exaggeration to say that he was good-looking; and the face,

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to any student of human nature, was a guarantee that there was nothing really bad about him. He was indolent, selfish—though not so selfish as his brother had described him—and careless of consequences; he was the kind of man who might develop into a criminal, but who might also be easily roused to take a proper view of his surroundings and become a hard-working citizen and a credit to society.

"Yes, I'll try it," he decided. "I am convinced that I should make her, or any other girl, a thoroughly good husband, while Miss Royston will, no doubt, prove an agreeable life-partner. If she doesn't, I shall travel for a month or two at a time and leave her to her papa."

* * * * *

The energy displayed by Dane Provyn during the next few days in his efforts to obtain an invitation to the country residence of Sir Charles Royston, Alderman and sometime Lord Mayor, was a proof that he had something in him which, if directed into the right channel, would take him a long way up Fortune Hill. At the time of the rescue he had treated the affair in his usual careless manner, instead of improving the acquaintance, as so many other people would have done. He quickly and skilfully repaired that blunder now, and his diplomacy met with a prompt reward.

His business was in the hands of a receiver who was acting for the creditors, so that he could afford to go away for a week; he did not go to see his brother, but contented himself with a few lines of scrawl which set forth briefly how matters (public and private) were progressing.

"According to the old saying, Fortune favours the brave," mused Dane Provyn, as he steamed along in the fast train to Rixdale. "I am not so certain about that; I should be inclined to say that Fortune favours the bold—well, yes, the impudent. But there, I needn't worry myself about the accuracy or otherwise of old sayings. It is sufficient for me that Fortune is favouring me, and that there is every probability of my becoming the son-in-law of Sir Charles Royston. Why, I may even be an Alderman and a Lord Mayor one day myself! Who knows?"

Sir Charles Royston was a pompous personage, who insisted upon the due observance of formality in anything appertaining to himself, although he was not so particular about it when it concerned other people. He had been Lord Mayor during an unimportant year, and had just by an effort obtained a knighthood; but he thought he had been scantily treated and was still of opinion that a grateful Sovereign would make up the deficiency, and create him a baronet as soon as the facts were made known.. Dane Provyn understood him to be one of those who would make their sons address him as "Sir Charles" in private life, rather than call him by the more affectionate term "dad" or "father"; therefore, as the worthy Alderman had no sons, it was most probable that even his daughter would have to call him "Sir Charles."

"Daughters sometimes manage to get the right side of fathers," thought Dane meditatively, "so I may hear her address him very familiarly, but I must not be surprised if I find that the utmost formality exists."

Rixdale Hall was a large mansion situated in a lovely part of the county and surrounded by an estate of considerable extent. Dane's eyes sparkled as he rode up to the house in the carriage placed at his disposal by his host; he felt something akin to a choking sensation at the thought that he might become the owner of this domain.

"If I don't succeed in captivating that girl, I'll—I'll——" Dane stopped for lack of ideas. "I shall deserve to be punched!" he concluded helplessly.

He wondered if Sir Charles would welcome him at the front door, but his host did not appear, and his daughter was also invisible. He was conducted to his room and informed that Sir Charles would see him in the library when he had made himself comfortable.

Dane did not hurry over his toilet. If Sir Charles was not demonstrative, neither would he be; if he took things coolly, it might teach the worthy Alderman that he was entertaining someone who had a good opinion of himself, and Sir Charles would be impressed. It was therefore more than half-an-hour later before Dane Provyn was ushered into the library.

"I am pleased to see you," was Sir Charles' pompous welcome. "You did me a service, young man, and I do not forget such things."

The condescending tone jarred on Dane's feelings. Most people would have called it a "great service" to have been saved from such peril; moreover, although he said that he did not forget such things, Sir Charles had not shown any strong disposition to remember this "thing."

However, Dane had a game to play, so he swallowed his resentment and accepted the proffered hand with a dignified air and suitable reply. The truth was that the young man had seen another figure which sent a curious thrill through him.

"I must introduce you to Miss Royston," said the host in his usual stiff manner. "Mr. Dane Provyn, my dear, who rendered me a—— Yes, I'm sure Miss Royston is—er—delighted to see you, Mr. Provyn!"

In the inmost recesses of his heart Dane fervently hoped that she was, and he could heartily reciprocate the compliment. Miss Royston was about his own age, full of womanliness and grace, with a sweet face that indicated both gentleness and resolution. She was the kind of woman who would lead a man to put forth all that was best in him and induce him to strive for the highest positions which his mental, moral and physical gifts fitted him to hold.

The greeting between them was formal, but there was a hidden warmth in it that was quite spontaneous.

"What a sweet creature she is," thought Dane, as he conducted her into the dining-room.

Somehow, he felt a little ashamed of himself and his mercenary motives, but his case was desperate and he crushed the sentiment.

"And what an old pig to insist that she shall call him by his title!" Dane had noticed that she always addressed him as "Sir Charles."

The dinner would have been a quiet, not to say dismal, affair had it not been for Miss Royston. The host kept up a conversation at first, but it flagged, and then the fact dawned upon Dane that his host was not especially pleased at having to entertain the young fellow.

After dinner Sir Charles excused himself on the ground of having still some business to attend to in connection with the county politics, and he left Dane and Miss Royston together.

"He is an unmannerly lout," muttered Dane. "He is the sort of man who would think the greatest service was rewarded if he handed you a £5 note, and who prefer to discharge their obligations by parting with money which they do not value because they have so much. You have given them something, so to put it, and they reward you by bestowing upon you what is nothing to them and they want to see it in big type in the papers.

"However, he is playing into my hands, for he is leaving me a clear field so far as his daughter is concerned. I wonder if he will refuse his consent? H'm, that would be awkward. No, I don't think he will; he doesn't care what she does, he thinks only of himself."

Dane passed a delightful time with his companion, and he flattered himself

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that he had already made an impression on her by the time they separated for the night. And as to himself? Dane shrugged his shoulders and did not attempt to answer the thought.

Sir Charles Royston did just what was demanded of him as a host and no more. Whenever he could find an excuse for getting out of Dane's society, he took advantage of it. Miss Bessie Royston—for Dane discovered that her name was Bessie—endeavoured unobtrusively to make up for Sir Charles' delinquencies, and so it came about that they were constantly together and the time passed very agreeably for the young man.

How pleasant were the strolls about the estate, the rides in the surrounding country, the hours spent in the old mansion together. Dane made good use of his time and wondered that the Alderman did not perceive the danger of leaving the two so frequently alone; he was making good progress and mentally resolved that he would propose before he quitted Rixdale Hall.

"It is turning out most fortunately," murmured Dane, with a light laugh. "She is the sweetest woman a man could hope to wed; she is growing fond of me—I'm positive of it—and I'm falling in love with her. Who could help it? I don't feel that I am good enough for her, but that girl would make an angel of any fellow, she is so good herself! Dane, you're a lucky dog!"

"Who is Miss Jessie Royston?" asked Dane on the fifth morning, and it was Bessie Royston to whom he addressed the inquiry. "I heard the name this morning for the first time, and I thought that it was a mistake, and that the man should have said Bessie, but it proved to be Jessie."

"Oh, that is my cousin!" cried Miss Royston, with a smile. "Our names sound rather alike, but here we usually distinguish between daughter and niece by calling me Miss Royston while my cousin is called Miss Jessie. She is younger than I, you see; she is not twenty!"

"That is one way to distinguish between you," laughed Dane. "But I wonder that Sir Charles did not have you called Miss Bessie and his niece addressed as Miss Royston."

"Well," she began, with a queer smile; but she could not continue, for Dane's glance was so ardent that she was compelled to drop her eyes.

"Do you know," he said, taking her hand in his, "that I should like to have the right to call you Bessie?"

She raised her eyes swiftly and as quickly lowered them; her bosom heaved and a slight flush stole over her cheeks. They were in a secluded corner of the flower garden, whither she had conducted him in order to show him some new specimens. They were side by side, but he drew round so that they faced one another. The time had come when he must secure this prize; he had a double motive in winning her now, for she had become dear to him and she was an heiress.

"Bessie, dear! I may call you that, may I not? You have become very precious to me. I wonder if you could ever learn to care for me as I care for you?"

She gazed at him with eyes full of love; he was startled at the depth of affection which he saw in them. She uttered no word, but that look was enough and he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

"I don't deserve this happiness, dear!" he cried, and he was conscious that he was speaking the unvarnished truth; he did not deserve it, for he was a worthless money-seeker, a careless ne'er-do-well. "I will try to be worthy of you, dear. But," he hesitated, "I ought not to take you from here, I fear! I am poor; I have nothing to offer you, for the business which I had is about to be broken up." His better nature was prevailing and he was making a confession. "And you are rich! What will your—Sir Charles say?"

He had been on the point of saying "your father," but he had checked himself; it seemed incongruous to call him that when his very daughter always spoke of him as "Sir Charles!"

Dane was looking far away as he spoke, for he was thinking with regret of his own careless life, his neglect of his business, and of his despicable plan in obtaining the invitation to Rixdale Hall. He was recalled to himself by Bessie's next remark.

"You are mistaken, Dane—I am not rich, and Sir Charles will regret my leaving here only because I have been useful to him and have thus repaid him for the money he spent on my education and upbringing after my mother, his sister, died.

"I am poor, too, Dane, but if we have one another to work for, we shall be happy and we shall succeed. I know that there are great and good qualities in you, and you will climb the ladder. But I do not mind if you do not realise your ambitions and mine, for we shall be happy together and we shall know that we have tried, that we have done our best. Oh, Dane, I am so happy!"

Dane Provyn heard all this like one in a trance. What did it mean? She was not Sir Charles Royston's daughter and heiress, but a penniless and dependent niece! What egregious blunder had he made? What an ass he had been. By some strange prank of Fate, he had allied himself to one as poor as himself, instead of to an heiress. He was stunned for the moment, and again it was Bessie's voice that recalled his wandering mind—Bessie's voice with a trace of anxiety in it that made him feel despicable.

"What is it, Dane? Are you ill? You have grown quite pale!"

He kissed her. "It is nothing; I shall be all right in a moment," he replied, assuming a cheerful, loving tone. "Let us sit down a while, and you can tell me about yourself, about Sir Charles and his daughter."

Bessie was radiantly happy in her new-found love. She explained the relationship again, and showed Dane a miniature photo of her cousin, the heiress.

Dane looked at it curiously; it was the insipid face of a vain girl, it was the countenance of a girl at whom he would scarcely have condescended to glance for her own sake alone. He contrasted this giddy girl with the sweet, helpful, hopeful woman by his side, and his heart gave a great bound.

Bessie loved him; he would marry her and together they would work and he would strive to repair the faults he had committed. He surprised Bessie in the midst of some remarks, to which he was paying no heed, by kissing her passionately.

"I will do my best to make you happy, dear, and you will encourage me to work. Let us go and tell Sir Charles."

Sir Charles Royston was not displeased; in fact, he was rather glad that his niece would soon be leaving him. He had an uneasy suspicion that Bessie monopolised the attention of certain guests in the season, and he wanted his daughter to do that. He gave them a kind of frigid paternal blessing, coupled with a hint that they had nothing to expect from him, and then dismissed the subject.

Dane left the following day by a train that started fifteen minutes before the arrival of that which was conveying Sir Charles' daughter to her father's country seat. He presented himself to his brother two days later.

"Well, Dane, how are things progressing?" asked Mark gloomily. "And the heiress? When is the wedding to take place?"

"The wedding will take place within three months, Mark," replied Dane quietly. "But the future Mrs. Dane Provyn is not an heiress; she is as poor as I am, and I am glad of it now. She will be more to me than a fortune would have been as you shall see, Mark. I am going to work hard at the firm, and I think that in three months I shall have altered the condition of things to such an extent that the creditors will consent to withdraw the receiver and I shall go on straight. You don't believe it, of course?"

Mark scanned the younger man's countenance narrowly; there was quite a new light in it.

"Yes, I do believe it," he said earnestly. "That girl, whoever she is, has done much for you already; with a fortune you would have done worse than you did at first, but with her you will make your mark."

Mark was right. Sir Charles did exceedingly little for them, but Dane is at the head of a firm which is making rapid headway, and is attracting general attention. He says it is all due to his partner, and most people are at a loss to understand this allusion.

F. Brewster.

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The Reformation of Dick Carstairs.

"WHAT is the matter with Frances?" I asked, looking across the room to where my little friend sat, pale and dejected, holding languid converse with one of her mother's guests.

"Frances is a headstrong, undutiful child," replied Mrs. Lacy with sudden energy. "She looks the picture of misery, doesn't she? It's all because I won't sanction her marriage with Dick Carstairs."

"They are very fond of each other, I know; but, of course, Dick is—well, rather fast. Yet the influence of a good, sweet girl might reform him."

"Well, I'm not going to sacrifice my only daughter on the offchance of being able to reform Dick Carstairs," remarked Mrs. Lacy with just indignation. "Frances has no father or brother to defend her, and as I am responsible for her, I don't intend her to marry a fast man. Surely, Lady Mary, you don't think a girl ought to marry with the object of reforming her husband."

"My reason is entirely with you, dear Mrs. Lacy," I hastened to assure her, "but I am very much afraid—you know how fond I am of girls and lovers—that my sympathies are with the young couple."

I think Frances had a good idea which way my sympathies were likely to run, for next day she came to lunch, and very soon started the subject of her woes. Dick adored her, she informed me, and he had said that when once she was his wife he would break off with all his wild companions, never touch cards, and never go near a racecourse.

"Mother is so hard," she complained, with tears in her eyes. "She won't believe in Dick. She doesn't believe he'd reform if he were married. She says a girl ought to marry a man who doesn't need reforming. Dearest Lady Mary, I know you feel for me. Isn't it the holiest mission a girl can undertake?"

"To reform Dick Carstairs? Well, I don't quite know, but talk of angels and you hear the rustling of their wings. What sends you here, Mr. Carstairs? From your guilty looks at each other, young people, I am of the opinion that there has been collusion here. Now this won't do. I can't allow you to meet at my house in defiance of Mrs. Lacy's wishes. Frances, I'm ashamed of you."

Dick Carstairs was by no means without good qualities, but he had been his own master from a very early age, and his easy good nature had brought him under the influence of some very fast men, whose example had led poor Dick into a most undesirable way of life.

He was devotedly in love with Frances, and protested that she would be his salvation. He pointed out that she was of age, and therefore need not pay any attention to her mother's prohibition, but I was glad to hear little Frances declare that she would never marry without her mother's consent.

"And she will never give it," added Dick gloomily.

"I do not know that," I put in. "After all, Dick, you must admit that there are reasons why an affectionate mother should hesitate about intrusting her one pretty little daughter to your care."

"But with Frances as my wife I would become as steady a fellow as could be wished for."

"Why not become steady before marriage? I never could advise a girl to marry in the hope of reforming her husband; but if you will pledge your honour to try to throw off every bad habit and every undesirable associate, I will exert all my influence with Mrs. Lacy, to get her to consent to your engagement."

Frances looked radiant, and Dick brightened up. He was ready to promise anything if only the hope of gaining his little sweetheart were not taken from him.

I had a hard task to win over Mrs. Lacy.

"All very well," she said, "and I daresay Mr. Carstairs has all the good qualities you say he has, but I know what kind of life he leads, and never will I allow my darling little girl to marry a man in hopes of reforming him."

"I quite agree with you; but suppose he reforms before marriage. Forgive my persistency, but I am so truly interested in Frances, and I know to part her from Dick will break her heart."

"And to be the wife of a gambler, and an idle, aimless, wild fellow, would break her heart also. He will promise anything now, but when he has attained his end, he will be just as wild and reckless as ever."

"But if you were to put him on a year's probation," I urged, "you would see how far he may be trusted. If you refuse all hope, he will go utterly to the dogs, and poor little Frances will break her heart. Let them become engaged on the understanding that if Dick reforms, breaks off all his bad habits, and becomes steady, the marriage shall take place just as soon as you are convinced you can safely sanction it."

Mrs. Lacy sat for some moments deep in thought.

"My one idea is to do what is best for my child," she began at last, "and, candidly, I do not think Dick Carstairs will make her a good husband. Yet, on the other hand, a longer acquaintance with him may open her eyes as to his true character, also he may tire of being always on his good behaviour, and may withdraw from the affair.

"On the whole I think I can't do better than yield to your suggestion. We will see how things are in a year."

The immediate results of Mrs. Lacy's consent to the engagement were most encouraging. Frances beamed with joy, and her sweet little face grew rosy and plump again. Dick grew steady, and became as manly and straightforward a young fellow as the most rigid of mothers-in-law could desire.

At the end of a year Mrs. Lacy was obliged to own that the reformation of Dick Carstairs was complete, and that she no longer feared to intrust her treasure—her treasured daughter—to him.

The other day, five years after the marriage of Frances and Dick, Mrs. Lacy said to me:

"I owe my happiness and that of my dear children to you. Had I not taken your advice, my daughter would have been a soured, disappointed old maid, and Dick would have gone entirely to the bad, instead of being, as they are now, the happiest couple and the best children that ever lived.

"It is safer to get a man to reform before marriage than to marry him first and try reforming him afterwards."

S. V.

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He Bored Her.

He: "Oh, I have a splendid story to tell you. I don't think I ever told it to you before." She: "Is it really a good story?" He: "Indeed it is." She (wearily): "Then you haven't told it to me before."

No Competitors.

Johnnie Masher (to the young brother of his best girl): "So Miss Ella is your eldest sister. Who comes after her?" Little Tommy: "Nobody comes after her; but pa says the first one that does can have her."

Suspicious.

Mr. Jones: "Oh, yes, I met Dick Bachellor, and told him all about the baby." Mrs. Jones: "Did he listen patiently?" Mr. Jones: "Very; he listened so patiently that I was afraid at first he wanted to borrow some money."

A Matter of Economy.

"I woo thee in the moonlight," sang the lover to his girl, who was gazing fondly on him from the basement. "It's much cheaper than the gaslight," sang her father, the old churl, who was taking observations from the basement.

His Hope.

"My dear," said Mrs. Henpeck, "I'm positive that our George is thinking seriously of matrimony." "Well, I only hope so," returned Henpeck with unusual spirit; "I wouldn't want any boy of mine to be so unfortunate as to regard it as a joke."

Complimentary.

Romeo: "But how did you induce your father to give his consent? You know you told me he was deeply opposed to actors?" Juliet: "I know; but when I told him it was you, he said perhaps it might not be so bad—that you weren't much of an actor."

Wouldn't Suit Him.

"She said her heart wasn't hers to give me." "What did you do?" "I took my hat and went." "You are an idiot. She meant that you already had her heart." "Do you think it? Well, it's all right, anyway. I never could get along with a girl who can't talk common sense."

A Pretty Riddle.

"Did you ever hear the alphabetical conundrum, Angelina?" "No, Augustus, what is it?" "It is: When will there be only twenty-five letters in the alphabet?" "Oh, I never could guess that!" "It's when U and I are made one, my darling." "What a nice conundrum it is, Augustus!"

Another Romance Spoilt.

Miss Oldgirl (coyly): "I had a strange dream the other night, Mr. Junior. I dreamt—only think!—that you and I were married, and on our honeymoon. You don't know how real it seemed. Did you ever dream such a thing?" Mr. Junior (firmly): "No, Miss Oldgirl, I did not. In fact, I haven't had the nightmare for a good many years."

Candid.

"How many fellows have called on your sister this week?" "Five." "That doesn't include me, does it?" "Oh, no. Sister says you don't count."

To Try His Capabilities,

The poet and the editor were playing tennis, and the latter was beaten. "You serve well, but you cannot return," said the poet. "Can't I?" asked the editor. "Send me a poem and see."

No Cause for Complaint.

Father: "He'd make a model husband. I don't see what fault you can find with him." Daughter: "That's just the trouble. Think of the disadvantage I should have in case we quarrelled."

They Were Unnatural.

Artist: "Oh! you think the background's 'beastly,' do you? Perhaps the cattle are 'beastly' too, though I flatter myself——" Friendly Artist: "Oh, no, my dear fellow! That's just what they are not."

She Had Stopped it.

Father (upstairs): "What time is it down there?" Fannie (down in the sitting-room): "Just ten by the clock, papa." Father: "All right. Don't forget to start the clock again when the young man leaves."

He was a Sour old Bachelor.

"I found a four-leaved clover this morning. There is an old saying that the finder will be married within a year." "Indeed! I was under the impression that the finding of a four-leaved clover was an omen of good luck."

An Improvement.

"Father," confessed the callow youth, "I have married her. We are two souls with but a single thought." "Well, you've gained something. A single thought isn't so many, but it is one more than I ever knew you to have before."

The Honeymoon is Over.

"No one comes to see me," said she wearily, "like they did before I was married." "Speaking of that fact," said he, "I used to call on you seven evenings in the week at that time. But I am as badly off as you. I now have nowhere to go."

A Good Reason.

Lover: "And so your mother does not believe in long engagements? I am delighted." Miss De Broker: "Yes, mamma says ever so many girls' fathers have failed during long engagements, and the poor things never got married at all."

She Never Tried.

He: "Miss Kitty, I've heard it said that a kiss without a moustache is like an egg without salt. Is that so?" She: "Well, really, I don't know—I can't tell—for in all my life I never——" He: "Now, now, Miss Kitty!" She: "Never ate an egg without salt."

No Alternative.

First Guest: "Awful bore, isn't it?" Second Guest: "Dull as a funeral. I knew it would be." First Guest: "You knew it? Then why did you come?" Second Guest: "Had to. My wife heard that the formula for writing regrets had changed and she couldn't find out what the new style was. So she sent an acceptance."

Then He Proposed.

They had looked soulfully into each other's eyes for some time, but somehow he didn't seem to come to the point. Then suddenly he made a discovery. "You have your mother's beautiful eyes," he said. She felt that the time had come to play her trump card. "I have also," she said, "my father's lovely cheque book." Inside of thirty minutes their engagement was announced.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Night Chase and the Mudlark.

"CAN'T find anything," Hazell said, as he jumped into the boat, and then privately to Racksole: "There's a woman on board. Looks as if she might coincide with your description of Miss Spencer. Steam's up, but there's no engineer. I asked where the engineer was, and she inquired what business that was of mine, and requested me to get through with my own business and clear off. Seems rather a smart sort. I poked my nose into everything, but I saw no sign of anyone else. Perhaps we'd better pull away and lie near for a bit, just to see if anything queer occurs."

"You're quite sure he isn't on board?" Racksole asked.

"Quite," said Hazell positively; "I know how to search a vessel. See this," and he handed to Racksole a sort of steel skewer, about two feet long, with a wooden handle. "That," he said, "is one of the Customs' aids to searching."

"I suppose it wouldn't do to go on board and carry off the lady?" Racksole suggested doubtfully.

"Well," Hazell began, with equal doubtfulness, "as for that——"

"Where's 'e orf?" It was the man in the bows who interrupted Hazell. Following the direction of the man's finger, both Hazell and Racksole saw with more or less distinctness a dinghy slip away from the forefoot of the Norwegian vessel and disappear down-stream into the mist.

"It's Jules, I'll swear," cried Racksole. "After him, men. Ten pounds a-piece if we overtake him!"

"Lay down to it now, boys!" said Hazell, and the heavy Customs boat shot out in pursuit.

"This is going to be a lark," Racksole remarked.

"Depends on what you call a lark," said Hazell; "it's not much of a lark tearing down midstream like this in a fog. You never know when you mayn't be in kingdom come with all these barges knocking around. I expect that chap hid in the dinghy when he first caught sight of us, and then slipped his painter as soon as I'd gone.

The boat was moving at a rapid pace with the tide. Steering was a matter of luck and instinct more than anything else. Every now and then Hazell, who held the lines, was obliged to jerk the boat's head sharply round to avoid a barge or an anchored vessel. It seemed to Racksole that vessels were anchored all over the stream. He looked about him anxiously, but for a long time he could see nothing but mist and vague nautical forms. Then suddenly he said, quietly enough, "We're on the right road; I can see him ahead. We're gaining on him." In another minute the dinghy was plainly visible, not twenty yards away, and the sculler—sculling frantically now—was unmistakably Jules—Jules in a light tweed suit and a bowler hat.

"You were right," Hazell said; "this is a lark. I believe I'm getting quite excited. It's more exciting than playing the trombone in an orchestra. I'll run him down, eh?—and then we can drag the chap in from the water."

Racksole nodded, but at that moment a barge, with her red sails set, stood out of the fog clean across the bows of the Customs boat, which narrowly escaped instant destruction. When they got clear, and the usual interchange of calm, nonchalant swearing was over, the dinghy was barely to be discerned in the mist, and the fat man was breathing in such a manner that his sighs might almost have been heard on the banks. Racksole wanted violently to do something, but there was nothing to do; he could only sit supine by Hazell's side in the stern-sheets. Gradually they began again to overtake the dinghy, whose one-man crew was evidently tiring. As they came up, hand over fist, the dinghy's nose swerved aside, and the tiny craft passed down a water-lane between two anchored mineral barges, which lay black and deserted about fifty yards from the Surrey shore. "To starboard," said Racksole. "No, man!" Hazell replied; "we can't get through there. He's bound to come out below; it's only a feint. I'll keep our nose straight ahead."

And they went on, the fat man pounding away, with a face which glistened even in the thick gloom. It was an empty dinghy which emerged from between the two barges and went drifting and revolving down towards Greenwich.

The fat man gasped a word to his comrade, and the Customs boat stopped dead.

"'E's all right," said the man in the bows. "If it's 'im you want, 'e's on one o' them barges, so you've only got to step on and take 'im orf."

"That's all," said a voice out of the depth of the nearest barge, and it was the voice of Jules, otherwise known as Mr. Tom Jackson.

"'Ear 'im?" said the fat man, smiling. "'E's a good

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un, 'e is. But if I was you, Mr. Hazell, or you, sir, I shouldn't step on to that barge so quick as all that."

They backed the boat under the stern of the nearest barge and gazed upwards.

"It's all right," said Racksole to Hazell; "I've got a revolver. How can I clamber up there?"

"Yes, I dare say you've got a revolver all right," Hazell replied sharply. "But you mustn't use it. There mustn't be any noise. We should have the river police down on us in a twinkling if there were a revolver shot, and it would be the ruin of me. If an inquiry were held the Commissioners wouldn't take any official notice of the fact that my superior officer had put me on to this job, and I should be requested to leave the service."

"Have no fear on that score," said Racksole. "I shall, of course, take all responsibility."

"It wouldn't matter how much responsibility you took," Hazell retorted; "you couldn't put me back into the service, and my career would be at an end."

"But there are other careers," said Racksole, who was really anxious to lame his ex-waiter by means of a judiciously-aimed bullet. "There are other careers."

"The Customs is my career," said Hazell, "so let's have no shooting. We'll wait about a bit; he can't escape. You can have my skewer if you like"—and he gave Racksole his searching instrument. "And you can do what you please, provided you do it neatly and don't make a row over it."

For a few moments the four men were passive in the boat, surrounded by swirling mist, with black water beneath them, and towering above them a half-loaded barge with a desperate and resourceful man on board. Suddenly the mist parted and shrivelled away in patches, as though before the breath of some monster. The sky was visible; it was a clear sky, and the moon was shining. The transformation was just one of those meteorological quick-changes which happen most frequently on a great river.

"That's a sight better," said the fat man. At the same moment a head appeared over the edge of the barge. It was Jules' face—dark, sinister, and leering.

"Is it Mr. Racksole in that boat?" he inquired calmly; "because, if so, let Mr. Racksole step up. Mr. Racksole has caught me, and he can have me for the asking. Here I am." He stood up to his full height on the barge, tall against the night sky, and all the occupants of the boat could see that he held firmly clasped in his right hand a short dagger. "Now, Mr. Racksole, you've been after me for a long time," he continued; "here I am. Why don't you step up? If you haven't got the pluck yourself, persuade someone else to step up in your place—the same fair treatment will be accorded to all." And Jules laughed a low, penetrating laugh.

He was in the midst of this laugh when he lurched suddenly forward.

"What'r' you doing of aboard my barge?" Off you goes!" It was a boy's small, shrill voice that sounded in the night. A ragged boy's small form had appeared silently behind Jules, and two small arms with a vicious shove precipitated him into the water. He fell with a fine gurgling splash. It was at once obvious that swimming was not among Jules' accomplishments. He floundered wildly and sank. When he reappeared he was dragged into the Customs boat. Rope was produced, and in a minute or two the man lay ignominiously bound in the bottom of the boat. With the aid of a mud-lark—a mere barge boy, who probably had no more right on the barge than Jules himself—Racksole had won his game. For the first time for several weeks the millionaire experienced a sensation of equanimity and satisfaction. He leant over the prostrate form of Jules, Hazell's professional skewer in his hand.

"What are you going to do with him now?" asked Hazell.

"We'll row up to the landing steps in front of the Grand Babylon. He shall be well lodged at my hotel, I promise him."

Jules spoke no word.

Before Racksole parted company with the Customs man that night Jules had been safely transported into the Grand Babylon Hotel and the two watermen had received their £10 apiece.

"You will sleep here?" said the millionaire to Mr. George Hazell. "It is late."

"With pleasure," said Hazell. The next morning he found a sumptuous breakfast awaiting him, and in his table-napkin was a Bank of England note for a hundred pounds. But, though he did not hear of them till much later, many things had happened before Hazell consumed that sumptuous breakfast.

Jules was pushed violently off the barge into the river.

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Confession of Mr. Tom Jackson.

It happened that the small bedroom occupied by Jules during the years when he was head-waiter at the Grand Babylon had remained empty since his sudden dismissal by Theodore Racksole. No other head-waiter had been formally appointed in his place; and, indeed, the absence of one man—even the unique Jules—could scarcely have been noticed in the enormous staff of a place like the Grand Babylon. The functions of a head-waiter are generally more ornamental, spectacular, and morally impressive than useful, and it was so at the great hotel on the Embankment. Racksole accordingly had the excellent idea of transporting his prisoner, with as much secrecy as possible, to this empty bedroom. There proved to be no difficulty in doing so; Jules showed himself perfectly amenable to a show of superior force. Racksole took upstairs with him an old commissionaire who had been attached to the outdoor service of the hotel for many years—a grey-haired man, wiry as a terrier and strong as a mastiff. Entering the bedroom with Jules, whose hands were bound, he told the commissionaire to remain outside the door. Jules' bedroom was quite an ordinary apartment, though perhaps slightly superior to the usual accommodation provided for servants in the caravanserais of the West End. It was about fourteen feet by twelve.

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It was furnished with a bedstead, a small wardrobe, a small washstand and dressing-table, and two chairs. There were two hooks behind the door, a strip of carpet by the bed, and some cheap ornaments on the iron mantelpiece. There was also one electric light. The window was a little square one, high up from the floor, and it looked on the inner quadrangle. The room was on the top storey—the eighth—and from it you had a view sheer to the ground. Twenty feet below ran a narrow cornice about a foot wide; three feet or so above the window another and wider cornice jutted out, and above that was the high, steep roof of the hotel, though you could not see it from the window. As Racksole examined the window and the outlook, he said to himself that Jules could not escape by that exit, at any rate. He gave a glance up the chimney, and saw that the flue was far too small to admit a man's body.

Then he called in the commissionaire, and together they bound Jules firmly to the bedstead, allowing him, however, to lie down. All the while the captive never opened his mouth—merely smiled a smile of disdain. Finally Racksole removed the ornaments, the carpet, the chairs, and the hooks, and wrenched away the switch of the electric light. Then he and the commissionaire left the room, and Racksole locked the door on the outside and put the key in his pocket.

"You will keep watch here," he said to the commissionaire, "through the night. You can sit on this chair. Don't go to sleep. If you hear the slightest noise in the room blow your cab-whistle; I will arrange to answer the signal. If there is no noise do nothing whatever. I don't want this talked about, you understand. I shall trust you; you can trust me."

"But the servants will see me here when they get up to-morrow," said the commissionaire, with a faint smile, "and they will be pretty certain to ask what I'm doing of up here. What shall I say to 'em?"

"You've been a soldier, haven't you?" asked Racksole.

"I've seen three campaigns, sir," was the reply, and, with a gesture of pardonable pride, the grey-haired fellow pointed to the medals on his breast.

"Well, supposing you were on sentry duty and some meddlesome person in camp asked you what you were doing—what should you say?"

"I should tell him to clear off or take the consequences, and pretty quick, too."

"Do that to-morrow morning, then, if necessary," said Racksole, and departed.

It was then about one o'clock a.m. The millionaire retired to bed—not his own bed, but a bed on the seventh storey. He did not, however, sleep very long. Shortly after dawn he was wideawake, and thinking busily about Jules. He was, indeed, very curious to know Jules' story, and he determined, if the thing could be done at all, by persuasion or otherwise, to extract it from him. With a man of Theodore Racksole's temperament there is no time like the present, and at six o'clock, as the bright morning sun brought gaiety into the window, he dressed and went upstairs again to the eighth storey. The commissionaire sat stolid but alert on his chair, and, at the sight of his master, rose and saluted.

"Anything happened?" Racksole asked.

"Nothing, sir."

"Servants say anything?"

"Only a dozen or so of 'em are up yet, sir. One of 'em asked what I was playing at, and so I told her I was looking after a bull bitch and a litter of pups that you was very particular about, sir."

"Good," said Racksole, as he unlocked the door and entered the room. All was exactly as he had left it, except that Jules, who had been lying on his back, had somehow turned over and was now lying on his face. He gazed silently, scowling at the millionaire. Racksole greeted him and ostentatiously took a revolver from his hip-pocket and laid it on the dressing-table. Then he seated himself on the dressing-table by the side of the revolver, his legs dangling an inch or two above the floor.

"I want to have a talk to you, Jackson," he began.

IF YOU ARE ILL

you should at once make up your mind to be well again. To do this you should determine whether your ailment springs

FROM INDIGESTION

and whether among the pains and distress that afflicts you, any of the following symptoms appear:

Dull Headache—Low Fever—
Yellowish Eyes and Skin—
Slimy Mouth and Tongue—
Loss of Appetite—
Hunger, with Fear of Food—
Languid Feeling by Day and
Sleeplessness at Night—
General Bodily Weakness—
Heavy Feeling in the Limbs—
Little Interest in Life
And its Affairs.

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"It may interest you to know that since sending you my testimony in 1897, to the value of Mother Seigel's Syrup, I have continued to enjoy good health. When I think how I suffered for many years I am sorry I did not know of that great remedy sooner. Nothing did me any good but Mother Seigel's Syrup—that cured me, and I shall always feel grateful." Thomas Anderton, 50 Mill Lane, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Feb. 15th, 1904. If it has done so much for thousands like these, it

WILL CURE YOU.

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"You can talk to me as much as you like," said Jules. "I sha'n't interfere, you may bet on that."

"I should like you to answer some questions."

"That's different," said Jules. "I'm not going to answer any questions while I'm tied up like this. You may bet on that, too."

"It will pay you to be reasonable," said Racksole.

"I'm not going to answer any questions while I'm tied up."

"I'll unfasten your legs, if you like," Racksole suggested politely; "then you can sit up. It's no use you pretending you've been uncomfortable, because I know you haven't. I calculate you've been treated very handsomely, my son. There you are!" and he loosened the lower extremities of the prisoner from their bonds. "Now, I repeat, you may as well be reasonable. You may as well admit that you've been fairly beaten in the game and act accordingly. I was determined to beat you, by myself, without the police, and I've done it."

"You've done yourself," retorted Jules. "You've gone against the law. If you'd had any sense you wouldn't have meddled; you'd have left everything to the police. They'd have muddled about for a year or two, and then done nothing. Who's going to tell the police now? Are you? Are you going to give me up to 'em, and say, 'Here, I've caught him for you'? If you do they'll ask you to explain several things, and then you'll look foolish. One crime doesn't excuse another, and you'll find that out."

With unerring insight, Jules had perceived exactly the difficulty of Racksole's position, and it was certainly a difficulty which Racksole did not attempt to minimise to himself. He knew well that it would have to be faced. He did not, however, allow Jules to guess his thoughts.

"Meanwhile," he said calmly to the other, "you're here and my prisoner. You've committed a variegated assortment of crimes, and among them is murder. You are due to be hanged. You know that. There is no reason why I should call in the police at all. It will be perfectly easy for me to finish you off, as you deserve, myself. I shall only be carrying out justice, and robbing the hangman of his fee. Precisely as I brought you into the hotel, I can take you out again. A few days ago you borrowed or stole a steam yacht at Ostend. What you have done with it I don't know, nor do I care. But I strongly suspect that my daughter had a narrow escape from being murdered on your steam yacht. Now I have a steam yacht of my own. Suppose I use it as you used yours! Suppose I smuggle you on to it, steam out to sea, and then ask you to step off it into the ocean one night. Such things have been done. Such things will be done again. If I acted so, I should, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing that I had relieved society of the incubus of a scoundrel."

"But you won't," Jules murmured.

"No," said Racksole steadily, "I won't—if you behave yourself this morning. But I swear to you that if you don't I will never rest till you are dead, police or no police. You don't know Theodore Racksole."

"I believe you mean it," Jules exclaimed, with an air of surprised interest, as though he had discovered something of importance.

"I believe I do," Racksole resumed. "Now listen. At the best, you will be given up to the police. At the worst, I shall deal with you myself. With the police you may have a chance—you may get off with twenty years' penal servitude, because, though it is absolutely certain that you murdered Reginald Dimmock, it would be a little difficult to prove the case against you. But with me you would have no chance whatever. I have a few questions to put to you, and it will depend on how you answer them whether I give you up to the police or take the law into my own hands. And let me tell you that the latter course would be much simpler for me. And I would take it, too, did I not feel that you were a very clever and exceptional man, did I not have a sort of sneaking admiration for your detestable skill and ingenuity."

"You think, then, that I am clever?" said Jules. "You are right. I am. I should have been much too clever for you if luck had not been against me. You owe your victory, not to skill, but to luck."

"That is what the vanquished always say. Waterloo was a bit of pure luck for the English, no doubt, but it was Waterloo all the same."

Jules yawned elaborately. "What do you want to know?" he inquired, with politeness.

"First and foremost, I want to know the names of your accomplices inside this hotel."

"I have no more," said Jules. "Rocco was the last."

"Don't begin by lying to me. If you had no accomplice, how did you contrive that one particular bottle of Romanée-Conti should be served to his Highness Prince Eugen?"

"Then you discovered that in time, did you?" said Jules. "I was afraid so. Let me explain that that needed no accomplice. The bottle was topmost in the bin, and naturally it would be taken. Moreover, I left it sticking out a little further than the rest."

"You did not arrange that Hubbard should be taken ill?"

"I had no idea," said Jules, "that the excellent Hubbard was not enjoying his accustomed health."

"Tell me," said Racksole, "who or what is the origin of your vendetta against the life of Prince Eugen?"

"I had no vendetta against the life of Prince Eugen," said Jules, "at least, not to begin with. I merely undertook, for a consideration, to see that Prince Eugen did not have an interview with a certain Mr. Sampson Levi in London before a certain date, that was all. It seemed simple enough. I had been engaged in far more complicated transactions before. I was convinced that I could manage it, with the help of Rocco and Em—and Miss Spencer."

"Is that woman your wife?"

"She would like to be," he sneered. "Please don't interrupt. I had completed my arrangements, when you so inconsiderately bought the hotel. I don't mind admitting now that from the very moment when you came across me that night in the corridor I was secretly afraid of you, though I scarcely admitted the fact even to myself then. I thought it safer to shift the scene of our operations to Ostend. I had meant to deal with Prince Eugen in this hotel, but I decided, then, to intercept him on the Continent, and I dispatched Miss Spencer with some instructions. Troubles never come singly, and it happened just then that fool Dimmock, who had been in the swim with us, chose to prove refractory. The slightest hitch would have upset everything, and I was obliged to—to clear him off the scene. He wanted to back out—he had a bad attack of conscience, and violent measures were essential. I regret his untimely decease, but he brought it on himself. Well, everything was going serenely when you and your brilliant daughter, apparently determined to meddle, turned up again among us at Ostend. Only twenty-four hours, however, had to elapse before the date which had been mentioned to me by my employers. I kept poor little Eugen for the allotted time, and then you managed to get hold of him. I do not deny that you scored there, though, according to my original instructions, you scored too late. The time had passed, and, so far as I knew, it didn't matter a pin whether Prince Eugen saw Mr. Sampson Levi or not. But my employers were still uneasy. They were uneasy even after little Eugen had lain ill in Ostend for several weeks. It appears that they feared that even at that date an interview between Prince Eugen and Mr. Sampson Levi might work harm to them. So they applied to me again. This time they wanted Prince Eugen to be—er—finished off entirely. They offered high terms."

"What terms?"

"I had received fifty thousand pounds for the first job, of which Rocco had half. Rocco was also to be made a member of a certain famous European Order, if things went straight. That was what he coveted far more than the money—the vain fellow! For the second job I was offered a hundred thousand. A tolerably large sum. I regret that I have not been able to earn it."

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Conversation for Lovers.

"HAROLD" is rather a talkative young man, but when in the presence of his beloved finds it very difficult to speak at all for long periods. Whether it is that he has nothing to say, he doesn't know. What is he to do to remove this defect?

* * * * * * *

Well, "HAROLD," I think you very likely make the common mistake amongst sweethearting couples in assuming that you must only talk about yourselves and your feelings when together, while when in other people's presence you would converse on general subjects. Perhaps the topic is easily exhausted so far as you both are concerned, hence your long silences.

* * * * * * *

As a matter of fact, your sweetheart should be one who opens your mind more than anyone else, and these silences rather suggest that you have not very much in common, or you would not find conversation so difficult. When next with her, try talking just as though she were an ordinary girl, and not your beloved, though there is no reason why you should not accompany your remarks with a squeeze, to show that you have not suddenly grown cold. I rather suspect that these silent love attachments have not very much solid basis, for those who are about to unite their lives should certainly have some interests in common beside themselves. Try talking on every subject you know anything about, and she must surely find something in which she is interested.

Paint and Powder.

"MADGE" tells me she is desperately in love with a very well-known actor. This infatuation has been discovered by some of her friends, who tell her that it is immodest and unwomanly for a girl to fall in love with those far beyond her station.

* * * * * * *

Certainly, "MADGE," you do not deserve such cruel names. It is not unnatural that a powerful actor like the one you mention should have made you spell-bound. But do not delude yourself with any hope that such an affair can lead to anything. Why not be content, like many others, to worship him as a hero? After all, it is probably only his stage-self you are in love with. As a man, quite possibly he would cease to exercise any such a spell.

* * * * * * *

You will soon grow out of this infatuation, as you are only eighteen, and in a year or two will no doubt meet the right man in real life. Meanwhile, why not cure your present distraction by going and seeing as many other actors as possible? You will, by this means, see that there are many other men on the stage equally splendid, and realise that falling in love with them, "in the paint and powder," is just as foolish as losing your heart to a hero in a novel, or, for that matter, a statue.

Lottie's Friendship.

"LOTTIE" is a candid girl. She admits that her temperament is really hateful. While one day she is on the best of terms with Dolly, her particular friend, the next she becomes simply horrid. Now, Dolly has begun to get a little tired of this, and has told "LOTTIE" sorrowfully that she fears their friendship cannot continue unless "LOTTIE" tries to be nicer to her.

* * * * * * *

I think "LOTTIE" had better, in her own interest, take Dolly's suggestion seriously—at any rate, for the time being. I know quite what kind of girl she is, and think the best cure would be for her to learn to value a friend by experiencing what alienation really means. Let "LOTTIE" and Dolly not meet each other for a month, and if, at the end of that time, they find they miss each other, they will come together as a matter of course, and perhaps "LOTTIE" will have then learnt to be more careful of the little restraints necessary in preserving one's attachments.

A Sudden Change.

"H. B." has been keeping company with a girl for four years, their ages being respectively twenty-one and nineteen. All of a sudden she asked him to cease writing to her, and after that said she wished him to give her up, not, however, assigning any reason. He has since seen a good deal of her, but thinks her views have changed as regards his suit.

* * * * * * *

Well, "H. B.," a girl's ideas often undergo a great change in four years, and you should not be very much surprised if there has been some modification in her early liking for you. I don't wish to discourage you, but her attitude may be explained by the fact that, while she is still fond of your friendship, she no longer thinks of you as a sweetheart. Ask her definitely to tell you the truth, and, if it is as I surmise, face it like a man.

* * * * * * *

I am always ready to sympathise with real disappointments and troubles in love. But for a young man of twenty-one, with his future to carve out for himself, to allow his thoughts to be distracted and his whole life confused out of a speculative wonder as to whether this or that girl loves, or merely likes him, or a dozen other small questions, is not to be encouraged. If she does not love you any longer, cease worrying about it, and spend your time trying to get on in the world.

Love or Money.

"FIDO" was once a groom, but is now a publican with means. When a groom a young lady with whom he walked out disdained his suit because of his poverty. Now that he is better off she has discovered she loves him. But meanwhile he has taken up with another damsel, who it appears always loved him.

* * * * * * *

I think you should obey your own feelings in this matter. Whom do you love the better—the girl who thought you were not good enough for her until you got your present position, or the girl who loved you all along? You should certainly marry the one you really love, and agree to let bygones be bygones. At the same time, the young lady who only began to think of you as a husband when you improved your finances would seem to be rather a worldly individual, and if I had the settlement of the matter, I should be strongly inclined to seal the union between you and the other one, whose love for you would appear to be the more enduring. But if it is the first one you love, don't hesitate to take her back to your bosom, if you can do it without breaking anyone's heart.

Cynthia

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